緋弾のアリアX
禁忌の双極
アルカナム・デュオ
Aria the Scarlet Ammo
赤松中学
MF文庫J

Novel Illustrations

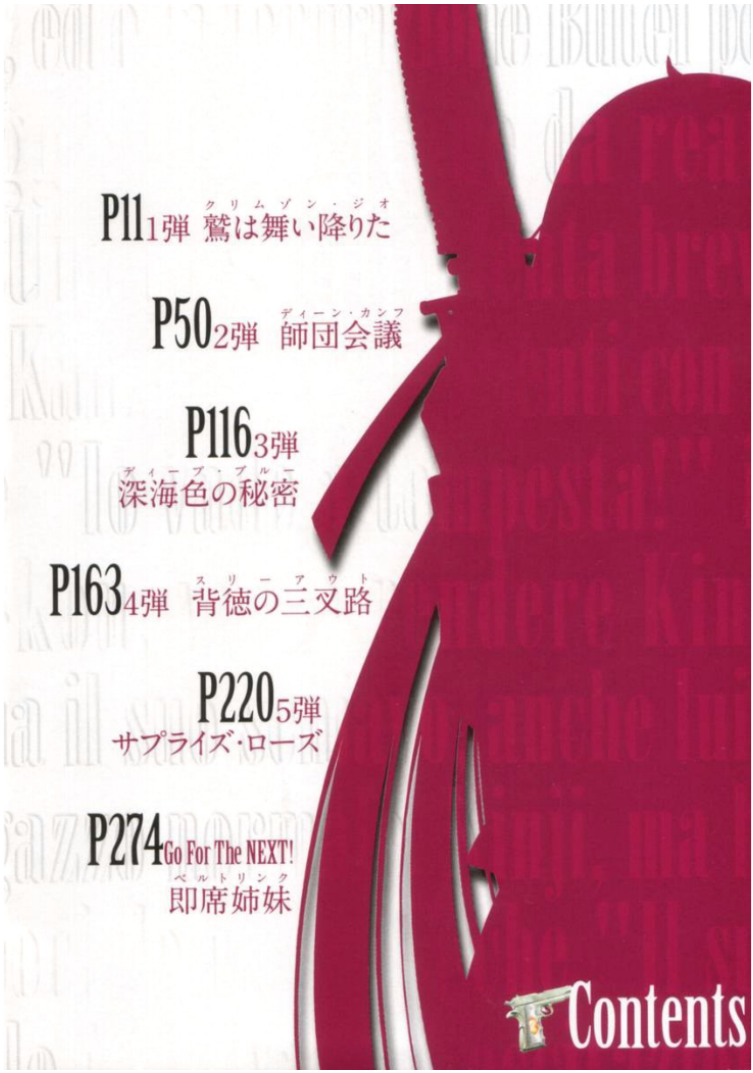
緋弾のアリアX

禁忌の双極（アルカナム・デュオ）

Aria the Scarlet Ammo

赤松中学

Aria
Reki
「やっと見つけた。お兄ちゃん。もう行こうよ」
Riko
Shirayuki



P11 1弾 鷲は舞い降りた（クリムゾン・ジオ）

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What happened?

Displayed on the screen of the phone was Aria, Shirayuki, Riko and Reki. All four of them were covered in blood and collapsed on the floor. Only I, who stood here, remained safe. All my teammates in Baskerville had actually been...wiped out!

(How can this be.....!)

Up till now, I've been going through every difficulty by protecting or being protected by my teammates in Baskerville. In that time, they've become my irreplaceable friends. But just as I decided that I'd protect them with all my might..something like this suddenly happened!

My finger started to tremble as I depressed the multi-task function on the phone, so I could try to record the video call.

Unfortunately, Reki's phone, which Haimaki brought to me, was a different model than mine. I could not activate the recording, and it would inevitably take me some time. I started to ask questions to stall for time.

"Hey! What's happening!? Where are you guys!?"

Despite my cries, the man who called himself GIII didn't respond to my question, simply saying: "I'm killing one every hour, starting now."

The girl beside him, who was called GIV, didn't say anything either.

I had already expected this. Before, when I asked him what kind of person he was, he simply answered with three simple phrases: "Shut up. Come here. Fight me."

However--

(If he just hangs up right here, this is going to be really bad.....!)

I have to get some useful information out of them. Why are they doing this, where are they, what weapons do they have, anything! If I have no clues whatsoever, then there's nothing for me to do but sit here and resign myself to this fate.

At that moment, a finger encased in a gauntlet of metal and bulletproof fiber, appeared on the screen, as if mocking the anxious me.

Not good, it's GIII's finger. He wants to end the call!

"Wait a moment! How did you guys.....just the two of you, manage to take down Aria and the others!"

"Huh? That's not how it went."

GIII smiled disdainfully.

“How many people were there, then?!?”

"It was only one person, IV."

One person.....!?

He said IV.....could he mean GIV? Which is to say, the girl who proclaimed herself to be my little sister, wiped out Aria and the others by herself!?

Impossible--. He's probably lying. I fear that even I, in Hysteria mode, wouldn't be able to escape from Baskerville's four girls, let alone fight them.

"I-If you're going to lie, then at least say something plausible! That's completely impossible!"

-----BEEP-----

Just as I finished shouting into the phone.....the call ended.

The call I had just received was from an unknown number. I couldn't call back even if I wanted to.

(.....What should I do.....?!)

--Beep, Beep, Beep--

As I stood there pale---the cellphone in my hand let out a prompting tone, devoid of emotion. It seems that I had received a mail.

This is Reki's cellphone, but it's an emergency right now, so there's no time to think about privacy.

I hurriedly opened the reception box—only to see that I had received a video message.

The sender’s phone number was a jumble of numbers, and there was no subject to the e-mail, nor was there anything to explain the video.

(To get this right now would mean.....that it's from GIII and his allies.....!)

I immediately opened the video--

Apparently, this video wasn't recorded using a hand-held video camera. From the degree of wavering of the image, it was probably filmed with some kind of goggle-mounted camera.

Which means that this is from the point of view of one of those two.

The image's definition was pretty high. It was also very clear. As for the time, it was probably filmed not long after sunset. There was also some audio output.

The place was...an urban area. On the roof? No, there seems to be something posted on the wall. Where the heck is this place? If I want to save Aria and the others, I need to confirm the location first.....!

I concentrated on the screen, examining the video, and saw a curved driveway about a hundred meters away from the camera. All

the buildings and the countless neon lamps were all arc-shaped——and they outlined a large circular form, which led me to deduce that they were on the inner side of the circle.

Practically, it looked almost exactly like the Roman coliseum I had learned about in world history class—a replica that had been drastically changed with modern science.

Then, the lens pointed towards the sky, and I saw what looked like the night sky, but encircled by a huge circle.

I understood—this was probably underground.

A funnel-shape was dug in the ground, and inside was a city.

(This is.....a geofront.....!)

A geofront, the generic term for a city way below the ground. The location on the screen is probably the "Shinagawa River geofront". It's also the only geofront in all of Japan that Haimaki could have returned from. As I became aware of this, the scene changed——the lens pointed towards the ground.

An uninterrupted pale green light came from beneath the person filming. It seemed that the person was standing on an S-shaped neon lamp.

Thereafter, the lens turned aside, and someone's figure appeared on screen.

Standing slightly to the side of the huge O-shaped neon lamp was a young girl——the aforementioned GIV.

The girl's entire body was covered by armor- like black, frosty protective gear. She was wearing semitransparent protective glasses, and the words “USLA-GIV” were printed on her left shoulder. A surprisingly long sword compared to her height —about 150 centimetres— was attached to her back at an oblique angle. This sword, at first glance, seemed like a katana combined with a broadsword, but it was different. Between the sword's edge and back, a shiny fluorescent blue could be seen. It gave off the feeling that this was no ordinary sword.

The maiden suddenly said:

"——*Sword beats gun*."

The words that came from the standing figure.....shocked me into silence.

Judging from her appearance, this girl was 1 or 2 years younger than me. Her height and weight matched with this age.

Despite this, she gave me a feeling, a supernatural feeling——she was an existence that possessed an attractive power...

Aaah....., I understand.....! I understand perfectly.

I'm really familiar with this kind of atmosphere. Very familiar indeed.

(——Kana.....!)

This girl.....I couldn't help but think that she looked a lot like her.

As soon as this idea came into my mind, I even thought that the huge sword strapped to her back looked like Kana's huge scythe Scorpio.

——Bzz, bzz—

At that moment, some kind of equipment that resembled cat ears suddenly slid backwards from the two sides of her head, moving to the actual places that cat ears would be.

It was most likely a paraboloid oriented-object that was supposed to collect aural information. It seemed that she was using it to search for something. Her short hair slightly floating in the wind, GIV jumped down from the neon light and into the void below.

The one filming ——GIII, followed her and jumped down.

As the both of them got gradually further from the letters SONY they were standing on just a moment ago——

Dong! A sound resounded loudly.

Immediately following was the image of a round hole in the sidewalk, with GIV landing on the ground and GIII following close behind.

On the screen, GIV, who drew her broadsword mid-air, calmly walked outside.

On the lane beside, what looked like illegal drugs and guns dealers scattered away in panic.

(This……how can this be possible……!)

Judging by the amount of time those two took while falling; they just jumped fifteen meters. No, twenty meters! How did they fall from such distance without a parachute or rope?

On the screen, walking between the lined-up cars, shouting: "Hey—laying a hand on my brother? How dare you!?", GIV——grabbed the hair of a girl, and dragged her out from inside a car.

(……It's Reki……!)

Reki was holding by her bosom a sniper lens, and its lid was opened. She seemed to have just tried to snipe the people, GIV included, on the neon lamp as she hid inside a car.

At that moment, a loud wild roar resounded, and springing out from beneath the car, Haimaki charged towards GIV, roaring.

"Aha."

GIV opened her eyes behind her protective goggles in excitement and let Reki go. With a punch far exceeding human limits, she sent Haimaki flying.

"……!"

Looking at Haimaki as he was demolished and sent flying, howling in pain and terror, I closed both of my eyes in reflex, though I knew that he was currently by my side.

There was a speeding car that had smashed into his body. And after the terrifying crunch, Haimaki collided with the car directly behind.

——Bam!

I heard a sharp clang of metal, making me open my eyes again. I saw Reki, who had attached a bayonet to her SVD, clashing with GIV.

Even though Reki's face was emotionless, she was just as fast as and even sharper than Aria in combat.

"Really, Onii-san, what good do you see in this mute girl."

While dodging Reki’s blow, GIV swung her broadsword, which clanged as it past Reki's bayonet. This is…! Reki’s bayonet had been removed from the rifle. No, it was chopped off! The steel bayonet was effortlessly chopped off by GIV.

“Maybe it's because she's young and vigorous?”

GIV kicked Reki behind a vending machine before quickly walking in her direction. Circling around the vending machine once, she swung her sword at the machine, and the lights went off. Having been sliced through diagonally, the top part of the vending machine slid down before crashing onto Reki's body.

"OK, the first one's been disposed of. Goodbye."

In the lower section of the vending machine——the cans as well as the plastic bottles that had been cleanly cut in two spilled their contents, the liquor.

(.....Reki.....to think that she'd lost so easily.....!)

Before I had recovered from my shock, I saw the scene change immediately——and was surprised once again, drawing a sharp intake of icy air.

On the screen, GIV was running on the streets downtown as the sounds of Petronels' gunshots rang out around her.....an unknown object was floating in front of her. It was a pearl-coloured rectangle-

shaped cloth-like object that was going as fast as GIV.

These two pieces of slender cloth, whose edges were white, crossed with each other to form an X, and spun like the helix of a windmill in the air as it sped forward.

(.....what was that.....!?)

Bam, Bang, Bam——

The clothes that were flying in the air collided with something formless in the air, twisting about in midair.

"——I found it! It's the one Onii-san loves the most!"

The camera lens pointed towards the voice. The person who had spoken was using the skywalk as cover, but the one shooting this way was——

(Aria.....!)

Now I understand. That piece of cloth——seems to be blocking Aria's bullets automatically. At the same time, it flies and protects GIV like a shield. Now that I look at it better, it looks like it is made out of bulletproof fiber. But, I've actually never seen anything like this.

“Who are you? At least let me put it on the newspaper!”

Aria inserted a new round of ammunition into the Government before charging up the stairs that led to the bridge. She probably did this to force the X shaped cloth away, opening up a clear line of fire on GIV.

“Tricks like that won't work! It's time to end this!”

GIV yelled as she darted past the X shaped white cloth. Slashing in a downwards angle —as if cutting a cake— she sliced off the stairs of the bridge. Aria fell with the ＜ shaped stairs—GIV used the back of her broadsword to bang against the stairs in mid air for a second, and then let it fall onto Aria’s head. The cloth that was flying in the air added to the pile of debris by hitting the traffic light so easily it

was as if it hit a cardboard box. “Aria!!” Even though this was just a video, and Aria’s silhouette already disappeared from view, I still could not help screaming for Aria.

The flying piece of cloth that GIV controlled was actually not a flying shield. It had this glow, just like the broadsword, so it must be an attack and defense weapon!

“OK, This one is the second one…”

GIV moved the video camera to the floor, where a sewer had been opened in half… and from the inside, a hand reached out and grabbed GIV by the ankle.

That hand— It is a Senior High School Inquesta bullet-proof sleeve that is made to be as light as a feather.

(That’s Riko!)

As soon as I realized who that was, a banging noise came from the sewer. Another hand came out with a P99 and faced GIV, who was violently trying to release the hand that was holding onto her ankle. Baah! Baaah! Went the P99, but all of the bullets were all deflected by GIV's protective gear and produced harmless little sparks. Even though the bullets seemed to pass through the small hole in the black protective gear, it did not. GIV swayed a bit, but otherwise she was unharmed. Her entire body, except her head, was covered in bullet-proof fibers.

“Now there is only one left.”

GIV took out a US Army M67 hand grenade, pulled off the plug, and threw the grenade into the sewer in a baseball-like position. It struck Riko, who gave out a cry and after a moment, the grenade exploded.

“…!”

My forehead started to cover with cold sweat as the screen changed into another scene. This time it was at the school campus garden and you could make out GIV’s and Shirayuki’s silhouette. A lamp on the side had already been chopped off, and the parked vehicle next

to it was wreaked *wrecked? —no, *sliced* in half. Looks like the fight had already started a while ago.

Shirayuki was still walking away from GIV until— Pa! Five red feather bullets were thrown into the air. Then from the back of her uniform she grabbed a wooden racket-like board and yelled, “Pentadirectional Feathers of the Scarlet Inferno!” and then using her left hand, swung the racket creating a kakaka noise. The feather bullets fell one after another—Bang! Bang! Three bullets caught on fire after such intense power towards it, and flew toward GIV. But the other two bullets seemed to not get the effect the other three did and just fell to the floor.

“~Wow~ So courageous! So adorable! I understand why you are liked by brother now, after all, you are also beautiful.” GIV completely ignore the three fiery bullets flying in her direction and pounced onto Shirayuki.

“Ah!”

“But—You know, tonight’s golden glass is really strong and I don’t think you little girls are strong enough to handle it! This is just a real~ly unlucky day for all of you!”

GIV sat on Shirayuki’s body that laid on the floor and using force, tried to yank Irokane Ayame out of her hand.

“Oy. Hand it over.”

“No… you cannot! Stop! This is not something you people can take! The Irokane will--”

“Just let me borrow it!”

Even though from this view – GIII’s angle—I can’t really tell exactly what is going on, but suddenly a loud yell came from GIV and it looks like she used her own broadsword to..beat Shirayuki’s face. Shirayuki could not resist the pain and loosened her grip on her left hand releasing the racket [instead of the sword].

Bang! Bang!

“Hurry up! Let. Go! Stop resisting! I am not going to break it! Kukuku! Teeehee!” GIV laughed as she continued to slash and bash her sword.

Even though Shirayuki was using her arms to protect herself, however, it seemed hopeless against the enemy who was riding on her body. Finally, the sword was taken by GIV and the video—ended.

“Ughhh….”

My head became very blank, but, but, now is not the time to be confused.

“Aria….Shirayuki…..Riko..Reki….”

Baskerville’s team of four has been overthrown, by the small lady who calls herself GIV. All of them are now in the enemy’s hands, GIII and GIV and to make matters worse, I had never seen these types of enemies until today. It’s like they are experts in terrorist weaponry rather than spying, and they could also be like Jeanne but with a different sort of witch-like ability. Based on the video, GIII and GIV must be…

(Science!)

It was probably “Neue Ange", the users of advanced weapons.

--A portion of the Butei, (and indeed, some criminals,) are able to acquire new materials and techniques even while they're being developed in scientific institutes, and they can do this before companies, before conjurers...probably before God. Whether by spending colossal amounts of money or by stealing them, they'll get their hands on them.

These Butei and criminals will then weaponise their materials or technology, using it to crush all those who use outdated weaponry.

That is why they are called cutting-edge technological arms. They have not been tested, so the risk is really high.... but if they manage to succeed, they will beat all general weapons easily.

Just like how Aria and the girls were beaten.

They are no ordinary swordsmen, and from their overpowered strength, it makes it really obvious. They are definitely using high-class technology.

Being against those type of enemies, even Hysteria Mode cannot beat them. Even if someone were to advance and try to defeat them, they will definitely be beaten into a sorry state.

(No, even though it is like this..!)

GIII-- That chap already said it before, they will be killing one every hour.

Now five minutes had already passed. Now is not the time to stand here and do nothing!

-- Slap!

In order for me not to be so scared, I slapped myself on the cheek. Now that I wasn't shivering as much, I could call Medica's Watson. In this type of situation, the wounded should be put in first priority, so we must get Medica to be ready on the move.

“Kinji?”

I promptly explained everything that has happened to Watson, sentence by sentence. I even passed her some information that even I haven’t figured out yet. As soon as I finished talking, I also sent her the video that they (GIII and GIV) had sent. Watson was at first at a loss for words but she still managed to say something back to me.

“I-I-I understand, after I analyze the video I will figure out a strategy. You should hurry up and get your equipment ready and in ten minutes, meet me at the vehicles section’s sixth garage. Together let’s find Aria and the rest and save them!”

She relied on her nature [to never to lose to men] and bravely replied to me in this way.

I tucked my Beretta, Desert Eagle and spare magazines into my bulletproof uniform, putting a short knife in my pocket and lastly, sheathed Scramasax on my back.

Then I pulled Haimaki, who was injured, into my room and told him, “Haimaki. You did well. I am going to rescue your master now.”

Without locking my door, I walked out of my room and then called Soumiya Tsugumi from Ambulace to give Haimaki treatment in advance. Then I hurried to the rendezvous as fast as possible. When I got there, Watson was just leaving the garage with a 911 Carrera Cabriolet and yelled to me, “Kinji! Hurry and get on!” Watson was simultaneously using her left hand on the steering wheel and her right hand to activate the emergency lights. According to the law, we did not need to sound the sirens.

After I entered the car, Watson stepped on the accelerator.

“Our destination is the Shinagawa River geofront. Aria and the others should be at…” Just as Watson was in mid-sentence, the intercom crackled to life.

“Watson, this is Jeanne. Is Tohyama there?” Jeanne said with an irritable, yet calm voice. Watson had probably contacted Jeanne to analyse the image in the video.

“Yes, we just assembled. Where are you?”

“I’m at Akihabara. I was originally at the audio store that belonged to Nakasorachi’s family before Watson contacted me. I’m currently using Nakasorachi’s radio to communicate with you.”

“Can you come now? Watson and I are rushing to the Shinagawa River geofront, however two people is not enough. We need more people –”

“No, we will not be preparing reinforcements.”

“What? Why not!”

“The enemy’s skills are higher than that of Aria and the others, thus

taking more people there would only increase the number of casualties. That is the meaning of the video."

Apparently, that seems to be it.

I was too impatient and hence I couldn't think of anything. However, those two guys sent that video to me on purpose. The meaning was "Fighting with us would be a waste of energy," right?

As the car sped across Odaiba, I clenched my teeth.

"We must not agitate the enemy. Since the enemy has two people on their side, we must not bring more than two."

"That… I know. But, what should we do now?"

"Negotiating to rescue Aria and the rest is our main priority. They attacked the members of Team Baskerville to lure you out. Hence, you need to find out their motive, and then negotiate with them."

Rescuing and negotiating. Although these are not tasks that I'm an expert in, this is the only way out in this situation. Of course, these guys are not like the enemies I've had before. These opponents are really formidable.

"This is Nakasorachi here," said a fluent and clear voice that resembled that of a news reporter. This was the second-year Connect student who often helped me, Misaki Nakasorachi.

"Through the sound of the video, the location has been identified. It should be 1-7-32, Shinagawa geofront Area 7. Specifically, it is the Aqua Theater on the seventh floor of the building."

"That is rather lucky; the car can travel directly to the building." Hearing the information gathered by Nakasorachi, Watson entered the location into the GPS of the car. After that, she stepped on the accelerator, driving the 911 Carrera Cabriolet through the Metropolitan Expressway.

After the Shinagawa geofront was built during the Japanese economic bubble, because of the fact that they could not raise the wages of employees, they left a large conical hole in the ground and

put the project on hold. This was similar to the past Academy Island and Empty Island. It is a legacy of the collapse of the third economic sector. Although later on, they used the reason of "redevelopment" to build a city, however…

"This place looks just like Brooklyn. This reminds me of the things that happened in New York Butei High," said Watson, who was looking out of the window. Just as she said, this place was full of open spaces, abandoned buildings and underpasses left behind by interrupted excavations. This area was the place with the poorest public order in the capital.

As we traveled along the spiral driveway down the road, custom shop signs and neon lights that looked like glistening mosquito lights could be seen everywhere. Nearly half of the signs were not in Japanese. After all, a feature of this underground city was that criminals were difficult to detect and they could escape easily, hence it seemed that a lot of criminals from all over Asia had come to this place. Also, because there were hackers and illegal radio theft dens, there were illegal radio waves everywhere. These radio waves were dubbed "Radio Typhoon."

The large electronic billboard which showed the smoke index had already been blackened by the emissions of the underground city. Groundwater and waste disposal systems did not seem to be efficient, and it seemed unhygienic everywhere.

Watson drove the car through the Shinagawa geofront–

"We've arrived, they are on the seventh floor."

And parked the car in front of a building. The building stood beside lights that were illuminating the sky. The outdoor decoration was totally different from the scene we saw before.

"Let's go."

To me, who was gripping the bolt of my gun –

"Avoid being too agitated, Tohyama. We must react calmly," advised Watson, who clearly had an aggressive personality.

It seemed that the building was closed today, so the main entrance had been locked.

Watson and I worked together and used a rope to climb to the balcony on the second floor. Because I did not know the lighting conditions in the Aqua Theater, I closed my left eye to let it be accustomed to the darkness. Then, I used the stairs to climb to the eighth floor.

“It’s here. Go in,” said Watson in a soft voice when we were near the entrance of the theater. Because there was no way to use a blinking signal, she could only use a soft voice.

The guiding lights at the emergency exit shone a yellow-green light on our face. We tried our best not to make a sound as we gently pushed the heavy door.

In the Aqua Theater, except for the ceiling above the stage, the auditorium was open-air. Because the lights from the other buildings and neon lights were shining, the theater was not completely dark. However, as the main lighting in the theater was turned off, the room was only dimly lit.

We opened our left eyes that were already accustomed to the darkness –

Looking at the stage, we saw Aria and the others like they were in the video. They were all lying on the floor, comatose.

Also… there was nobody else around. There wasn’t a single noise.

Watson and I went up the stage, running towards the four girls.

“Aria, Shirayuki… Riko, Reki…! Hey…!”

“Tohyama, don’t be flustered. I’ll diagnose them, you shall be in charge of guarding the perimeter,” said Watson, before starting to check their condition.

Hence, all I could do was to look around, protecting everyone.

“It seems that all four of them are still alive.”

Just as Watson said that –

“They won’t die,” replied someone who was at the front of the audience.

“Washington Columbia Special Zone Act Article 5509D, Law Article 8807 – For Butei licenses obtained in Washington, DC. Regardless of any circumstances, Butei cannot kill people. –Well, I can still kill if I want to.” That sound was full of vigor.

“Ugh…!”

Turning my head towards the audience, I saw a person in the centre of the second row–

A place where I had already checked –

The person in the video, GIII, was there.

GIII put his leg-protective gear that looked like boots against the back of the seat in front of him, as he read a book. He was not alerted and did not even look at me, who was holding a gun in my hand.

“Beware, Tohyama! Who knows whether someone else is in the vicinity!”

Just as Watson was speaking and grabbing hold of her SIG P226R,

“Are you talking about me?”

This time, it was from above–

The sound came from somewhere around the stage lights.

“…!”

GIV…!

It was the protagonist in the video just now, the girl who defeated Aria and the others by herself.

On the matte black protective gear, blue fluorescent lights could be

seen.

“Who, who are you? GIII, according to what you said just now – are you an American Butei?”

“I feel honoured. Far East Warfare– We intend to play this little game with you.”

Watson was on alert towards GIII, while I kept a close watch on GIV.

After GIV showed me an enthusiastic face, she moved the probe which looked like cat ears that was on her head.

“Ah…”

Just like the soft sound made by her, fluttering…

The hair behind her neck slowly became dishevelled.

It seemed that as long the device worn on her head is activated, a cooling fan behind her neck would release air.

“…Not bad…”

As if she couldn’t see anything other than me, GIV concentrated on me with her eyes.

Her smile, revealing intoxication, trembled, as if unable to extricate herself in ecstasy.

She looked like she was a beast who just saw her prey in front of her.

“IV, take off the mask. Tohyama Kinji’s moves should be like mine, so don’t record it.”

After GIII said this, GIV nodded –

Using smooth movements, GIV took off the head mounted display that looked like red sunglasses.

In the gloom, I saw her face –

“…Ooh…”

It was a girl so beautiful that people could stop breathing just by seeing her.

Overall, she had a childish look. Her youthful look hinted that she was about fourteen to fifteen years old.

Her confident eyes radiated with vigor. She had black eyes… no, it’s a little bit of dark blue. Her nose was firm, while her pink lips looked adorable.

But– the expression on her face as she looked at me seemed to be full of burning desire.

Her face gave a mature impression as she seemed to stare through me.

“IV, if it’s this guy — you should be able to enter, right?”

“Yes, yes! So, can I try it?”

“Go ahead.”

After GIII and GIV finished their conversation –

“____!”

GIV descended like an eagle.

—Towards me.

“Tohyama!”

Just as Watson exclaimed, I rolled away, avoiding GIV’s legs.

The floor where GIV landed was destroyed.

Just as I was about to fire my Beretta–

“I’ve been looking forward to seeing you, Onii-chan!”

GIV’s kick hit my right knee.

“Argh!”

I fell onto the stage floor– Unable to stand up.

Her protective gear appeared to be made of Duralumin aluminum alloy, but her leg muscles were extremely strong. Thanks to my training in Assault, my bones were still alright, however my ligament may have been hurt.

“Stand up. Hey, stand up. I will not use a monomolecular shock blade nor a fiber shield. I will not kill you, so stand up. Let’s play.”

GIV revealed a smile that gave me an impression of blooming flowers as she walked in front of me.

And–

Bang!

The moment I removed my leg from its original position, the floor where my leg had been was destroyed by her.

“There’s no need to act weak, Onii-chan.”

“What, what are you saying…! What do you mean by “act”…!”

GIV maintained her smile, but still approached me with stiff eyes.

“How can my Onii-chan be weak?”

“I, I don’t have a sister like you!”

I raised my Beretta, but GIV only gave me a wry smile.

She isn’t afraid of guns, she totally isn’t.

Just as I was going to pull the trigger –

“Enough, IV.”

GIII, who had been observing the stage and ignoring Watson who was pointing a gun at him, stood up.

“Tsk, I originally thought that I would be able to say it in fury!” Said GIII to himself as he scratched his head.

(Fury…?)

“Eh? Has it ended?”

GIV stared at GIII and I.

“Correct, I have already understood. There’s no value in fighting with this guy.”

“No, III! I still want to have a fight with Onii-chan. I want to understand Onii-chan, let us get to know each other more.”

GIV said, pointing a finger at me. Then, she grabbed the knife at her chest–

“IV–! You dare to disobey my commands!”

GII’s roar resounded throughout the theater. In a moment, Watson's and my eyes widened.

“Ooh…!”

With this, the momentum–

I know. This one, I know.

This murderous look that resembled a ghost and a dragon…!

This is like when Nii-san is not Kana – known as the “Ghost of Silence” –

(Dad…!)

Before the Butei system in Japan was implemented, the person who worked directly under the Ministry of Justice and was an armed prosecutor and died… my father, Tohyama Golden Cross…!

Being roared at by GIII, GIV trembled constantly…!

That reaction by GIV had never been shown, neither when she was

attacking me nor in the video…

It was obvious– fear.

That was an expression of fright.

“…Yes, sorry! I’m, I’m only, slightly…playing, playing too much. That’s all. S-sorry…!

Looking at GIII, GIV moved backwards, her face sweating, knees trembling continuously.

(… Her attention is away from me…!)

At the moment I was aware of this, I relied on my habits trained in Assault and took action.

By reflex, I pointed my Beretta at GIV – At that point in time,

“Stop, Tohyama! Don’t attack!” Watson grabbed my hand and pulled me, who could not exert force on my right leg, onto the floor.

“You saw the fear in that girl’s expression, didn’t you…! That guy is stronger than the girl who defeated the entire Baskerville by herself!”

“Constrain yourself, Tohyama! The current situation is like what Jeanne said! Those two people can just kill us! If that happens, even rescuing Aria and the others would be impossible!”

“…Ugh…!”

Watson was absolutely correct.

If we were to attack, we would lose. More importantly, we still need to rescue Aria and the others. Attacking would be a bad option.

But…!

When I’m against GIII and GIV – I don’t know why, but I seem to feel enraged and agitated.

“I know, Tohyama Kinji.”

GIII turned his back-protective gear that wrote USLA-GIII towards us and prepared to leave the theater by himself.

“Ssss… Ssss…”

He disappeared slowly.

He seemed to become less opaque, just like how he did at the Far East Warfare conference.

“Light camouflage…! It has already been improved to the point where it has practical applications…!” said Watson, cold sweat streaming down her face.

“Tohyama Kinji, you seem furious at us. But unconsciously, you think “Ah, I can be exempted from a fight”, hence you are even more furious. Am I right?”

“What are you talking about…?”

“Why don’t you try opening fire? I’m sure you can still see where I am.”

GIII, who was about to become fully transparent, kicked the heavy door of the theater.

“IV, if Kinji has not awakened to Regalmente, you need to let him become accustomed to HSS. Come back after both of you are accustomed to HSS. From this time onwards, our combat plan is switched to γ (Gamma). After you two have become a strong pair, I will contact you.”

GIII said a lot of confusing things about HSS… About Hysteria Mode.

After that, just as he finished speaking –

His figure had disappeared.

He had disappeared. He was there just a moment ago…!

After GIII disappeared – GIV slowly paced past us in small steps… Starting by walking towards Aria and the others who were lying on the floor, she then revealed an innocent and lovely smile.

“I’ve called for the car. Take the worms that harassed Onii-chan to the hospital.”

GIV, who revealed a smile, seemed to have lost her killing intent.

Even so, I still couldn’t put down my guard.

“I’m…I’m not your brother. How am I supposed to trust you…!”

I pressed my right knee which had been kicked by GIV as I glared at the broadsword on her back.

“Nn… Then so be it.”

Ssss–

Vapour-like particles were ejected from her protective gear. Then, all of her equipment, including the broadsword, fell onto the floor. The only gear left on her body were- shoes that resembled ski boots– and a black form-fitting suit.

The form-fitting suit was as thin as a pair of stockings. It was made of the latest bulletproof fibers, and made GIV’s immature body curves look obvious. Her waist line could be clearly seen, and as I looked closely…

I... I realized she wasn't wearing…!

I was utterly petrified.

"…Aaah! Don't, don't look, Tohyama!"

Chk

Watson used both of her hands to cover my face, including my eyes. Good, good one, Watson!

“Erm, Tohyama – Do you have a sister…?”

“N-no. I’m very sure I don’t! It was that person who proclaimed it herself!”

After strong denial, I wriggled out of Watson’s grasp.

Trying not to look at the direction of GIV, I kneeled beside Aria and the others.

“Hmm, let’s take them away. Bring them to that place called “Butei Hospital”, is that ok?”

After GIV said that, she carried Aria and Reki on her shoulders.

It seems like… that kid is serious… about saving the four girls that she defeated.

I carried Shirayuki on my back–

“… Their condition isn’t too serious,” whispered Watson, who was carrying Riko on her back.

“III has ordered me to do something tonight, so I have to separate from Onii-chan.”

GIV seemed to have heard what Watson said, and winked cutely at us.

“You seem to strictly follow GIII’s commands, is he stronger than you?”

GIV glanced at Watson who seemed to be interrogating her.

Then–

She answered the question, which Watson and I hoped the answer to it would be “No”.

“Yup, he is much stronger than I am. And I- will definitely not defy people who are stronger than me.”

At the entrance of the building, there was a black Hummer jeep.

Standing next to it was a man wearing a suit. As he bowed, we could see his pure white hair.

“Lady IV, you have performed well.”

The man raised his head, showing his twisted expression. He looked as if he could not straighten his back and was hunching over. Although he was a Caucasian who just entered old age, his hunch was probably not caused by his age, but a disorder in his nervous system.

“Thank you, Angus. What about III?”

GIV threw Aria and Reki into the car that the man opened, then the man… Angus, talked with a strong tone.

“Sir Tohyama and… that man, are you going back in that car? We are going to bring the ladies to Butei Hospital,” said the man, showing a smile.

Thus–

Watson turned towards GIV and the old man.

“I understand that you already have no intention to fight, but that doesn’t mean that we trust you. GIV shall sit in my car. Tohyama shall sit in the other car.

Although I thought of calling Logi for a car, if there was an accident on the journey, we would be implicated. Moreover, we need to bring Aria and the others to the hospital as fast as possible.

Just as Watson said, as hostages of the unarmed GIV, it would be better to travel in two cars.

After seeing me nod, Watson searched the old man for suspicious items. Watching this scene, GIV laughed gently.

“How unreasonable. Angus will definitely never bring a weapon.”

“Don’t be long-winded. Come, ride my Porsche. Let me remind you, my Porsche has an explosive function, so remember to not do

anything suspicious."

"Nah, don't worry. Come to think of it… Watson, your face is really cute, just like a girl's."

Without a reason, GIV glared at Watson's cute face.

" –! Y-y-y-you're too rude! I am a male! Let me emphasize that, I am a male! I. Am. A. Male!"

Hey, hey, Watson.

Don't blush when you are denying that.

You really will give her a hint.

Also, did you just say that your Porsche has an explosive function? I will never ride it again.

Sigh "In the future, is it that I will have to kill Onii-chan's male friends? It feels like both of you are compatible. How do you put it… It's like a double man team."

"You… you, what kind of weird things are you thinking? Are you perverted?" said Watson, whose face was within spitting distance of GIV.

Let's not talk about her.

After I carried Riko and Shirayuki into the Hummer, I sat on the sparkling clean leather seat of the car.

The old Angus limped towards the car and got into the driver's seat…

I still couldn't trust him, so I couldn't help but glance at him.

"Please do not worry, Sir Tohyama. I am merely Sir III's butler."

He twisted his neck to look forward –

The Hummer, which looked like a military vehicle, made its way to Butei Hospital. Angus' skill in driving seemed to be a notch higher

than any driver in the world.

As we traveled towards Academy Island, the old man's driving was as if he was chauffeuring nobility; careful and well-behaved, complying with the road laws.

I secretly glanced at his face…

Although his eyelids were twitching and looked distorted, he seemed like a tamed herbivorous animal.

(He doesn't look like a bad guy…)

He self-proclaimed to be GIII's butler. That being the case, if I said anything, he would convey it to GIII. I wonder if that would cause trouble for me. Thus, I was silent throughout the journey.

After we successfully arrived at Butei Hospital, we brought Aria and the others into the hospital.

Watson, who had a British physician's licence, told me not to put our guard down. After that, she went into the hospital. Angus merely bowed in respect, and then drove the Hummer away.

I ended up with GIV, who was standing beside me for no specific reason.

Looking closely, GIV was wearing a long body coat. That looked familiar, it was probably Watson's.

"We can now be alone together, Onii-chan."

After GIV said that, she looked up at me with inexplicably intoxicated eyes. After our eyes met, she narrowed her eyes happily. That action really resembled those of a fourteen to fifteen year old girl.

As the evening breeze blew, the sweet scent of caramel came from her hair.

"Don't come too close to me… Also, I don't have a sister."

“There is, isn’t she here?”

“I told you not to come so close!”

“–Fine, since Onii-chan says so, it’s ok to be separate for a night. After all, I do have many things to prepare.”

“…Prepare? What do you need to prepare?”

“It’s. A. Secret.”

Facing me, who had a look of suspicion, GIV gave me a playful wink. Then, she turned her back to me and walked away.

2nd Ammo - Deen Conference

Late that night, I received a notification from Watson.

Her inspections had revealed no major injuries to Aria and the others.

Having been struck both by debris and the concussive blast of a grenade, and yet suffering only minor injuries, the girls' stubborn vitality was truly worthy of the name Baskerville. Despite being left at a loss for words, I nonetheless heaved a sigh of relief.

Nevertheless, erring on the side of safety, those four were to be interned at Butei hospitals for a week. Haimaki, who had been twice hit by cars, faced a similar situation.

The following day-

Without leaving me sufficient time for recovery, Jeanne contacted me, saying, "In light of the GIII and GIV incident, we're convening a gathering of Deen."

Adding to that, after school today, the Halloween celebration begins (I'd heard that because of the break at the end of October, the festival had been changed to today). Masters had directed that all students leaving campus must be appropriately dressed. Simply speaking, we were to dress up as ghouls and goblins and the like.

Even though I was hardly in the mood to play along, if one of our horrifying teachers caught me in my uniform, I'd be beaten 'til I nigh looked the part. That being the case, meeting aside, I'd find myself in the hospital if I wasn't careful.

Consequently, I'd better at least borrow a hermit's robe and hood from Amdo, dressing up as an obake before attending the meeting. [1]

The meeting place was the family restaurant Roxi, and in its shaded outdoor terrace-

Deen's members had already assembled.

Though I'd walked here without difficulty, my knee, which had been given a painful kick by GIV, continued to throb.

Because of the need to change clothing, I'd been running slightly behind schedule, but my knee had kept me from running, and I found myself unable to make our 3 o'clock meeting time, arriving just a little late at the appointed place.

"Sorry I'm late. In case you couldn't tell, it's me."

I announced myself, the sole remaining representative of Baskerville. Face nearly covered by my hood, I ordered a cup of Oolong tea before approaching the round table.

"You're late, Tohyama. Normally, you're already gloomy enough, but to go so far as to wear such drab garments..."

Jeanne d'Arc of IU's Daio Nomad turned to me, coffee cup in hand.

Under her right eye was a brilliant, snowflake-shaped sticker, on her head, a pointy black hat, and in her hand, a star-tipped wand. In short, a witch.

Hey, since she's a real witch, what's the point in dressing up as one? Why don't you try a little creativity every now and then?

"One of Tohyama, thou hast encountered some difficulty. Dost thine knee trouble thee?"

The one with even less of an imagination would be-

Bending her exposed tail into a "?", Tamamo inquired this of me. She wore a hakama, disguising herself as a fox spirit. You might also say she hadn't bothered to disguise herself at all, as she was a fox spirit to begin with. Just how relaxed can you be?

Even though she normally wears a hat to hide her ears, they're now in plain sight for all to see; is that really okay?

The only thing she's really done is to stick three black lines as

whiskers on each cheek, but having done a poor job, the mere act of her turning has already resulted in the casualty of a single whisker.

On the other hand, the Liberty Mason representative Watson...

"Tohyama, the same goes for me. In case you couldn't tell, it's me."

She'd raced down a completely different path of mistaken creativity, having taken a Jack-o'-lantern -a real, hollowed-out pumpkin- for a mask, covering her head in this manner.

...Wearing something like that, isn't the pumpkin smell hard to bear?

From the neck down, she wore something like a white raincoat. This was undoubtedly a costume that would leave one clueless as to her true identity. Until she opened her mouth to speak, I had had no idea it was her.

"Oh my, everyone. What ominous appearances, though I must admit, quite cute indeed, hehe."

Hearing this light laughter, I turned to look at the laptop resting upon the tabletop.

On the screen was Meiya, apparently employing some Skype-like video functionality to take part in the meeting.

She was the envoy from the Vatican in this "Far East Warfare," and also a junior of Kana during her time as an exchange student at Rome's Butei High.

Meiya looked at the dubious-looking crowd that was us, revealing a smile as if she was a caretaker at a nursery. How utterly irritating.

Looking carefully, the window behind Meiya showed darkness, affirming the difference in time between our two locations.

"Disregarding the wait, let's begin our meeting. Yesterday, four members of the group belonging to Deen, Baskerville, including also a member of Ulus, were attacked and beaten by the supposedly 'unaffiliated' GIII and his subordinate GIV."

Jeanne skillfully began to explain the situation. She almost seemed to be the leader of the group, or perhaps a capable cabinet member.

"Yesterday, on the road home, I asked GIV for her reasons. Apparently the reason they fought in the Shinagawa River geofront was simply because they'd discovered Reki's presence. Reki included, before being ambushed, neither Aria nor any of the others had ever encountered GIII's group before. In brief, it was completely a surprise attack,"

Watson-the-human-pumpkin added,

"Even if they're lacking in numbers, this kind of sneak attack is still hard to countenance."

Jeanne's blue eyes blinked, and she shifted her legs beneath her hard tulle and satin panier.

"They seem to think nothing of contemptible, shameful tactics, an ideology where the ends justify the means."

Without appearing to recall what things she had done previously, Watson-the-pumpkin spoke thusly.

"What should we do now? GIII and GIV are currently operating separately. Should we seize this opportunity?"

As I cut to the heart of the matter-

Hmm...?

What? Everyone seems to have averted their gaze, including even Meiya on the computer screen.

What's going on with you guys?

"..."

The only response came from Tamamo, who closed both eyes, sipped her melon soda, and spoke,

"I understand thou art disturbed on behalf of thine companions, but

despair not, little one. I ask thee, one of Tohyama, canst thou obtain victory?"

She opened her eyes, exposing a penetrating, inhuman perception.

"That's..."

"Now, from what Watson hast shared, those young ladies of Baskerville could do but naught against GIV. Their leader - GIII - is yet greater still. If thou still believest thou canst win, then share thine plan."

Tamamo's tail arched, pressing lightly against the back of the chair. I could only stutter.

"...Er, when it comes to specifics...I can't really think of anything on the spot..."

"One of Tohyama, stand not upon custom. In 'Warfare', no matter the time, regardless of who has challenged whom, all is permitted. Though such a tactic may be vile indeed, they have nonetheless committed no sin."

"You mean we shouldn't retaliate?! Our companions have been ambushed by despicable means!"

Though I frowned in heated emotion,

"Ambush? How was it an ambush? This is war."

Tamamo casually replied as she had before.

"What...!?"

"This thing called war is even so. It is utterly and altogether different from the spirit of fair competition in sports. Once more, war is not a mere scuffle. From times long past, reconciliation has only come after blood-soaked struggle."

Tamamo spoke, staring at me all the while, leaving me without rejoinder.

This...contemptible fox.

While looking like an elementary school student, she dares to talk back to a high school student.

"One of Tohyama, canst thou not understand this one point? Why there remains but one member left of Baskerville? This is their message to us, 'We are strong,' even going so far as to leave a messenger - GIV."

"But they're the enemy! Are you fine with letting the enemy run free?"

"Enemy? Then I ask thee, hast GIV bared enmity before thee? Didst she not cast off her armor and lay down her weapons? They have not as of yet shown true hostility towards Deen, instead giving room for negotiation. We must not, of ourselves, make ruin of this opportunity."

"That's...hmm, that's not wrong..."

"Moreover, it seems the weapon they employ is 'science,' truly a peculiar existence."

Yours is the peculiar existence!

Nearly blurting this out, I instead swallowed my reply.

"The disciples of science and us -witches and spirits- a hard battle indeed. Worse, currently Ririirokane's particles are particularly dense."

Tamamo's puffed her cheeks unhappily.

"Ririirokane...?"

I remember, it ought to be a kind of Irokane located in Reki's homeland.

Before, when the three Koko sisters of Ranban had seized control of the Shinkansen, I'd heard something like "its anger has scattered invisible particles, rendering the ability of all the ability users in the

world unstable." Is this related to that?

Jeanne turned her head to look at me, whose knowledge only skimmed the surface.

"Though this might be difficult to grasp, but Ririirokane looses particles that disturb the abilities of ability users. It's similar to how metallic chaff can render radar ineffectual, except only causing complications...the range of its effect is very broad."

"How broad?"

"Sufficient to cover a third of the Earth's surface area. At the time of the cultural festival, it again intensified. Japan now falls within its realm of influence."

Jeanne had declared this a hard thing to grasp, as it most certainly was.

A phenomenon that disturbed supernatural abilities on a global scale?

Speaking from the perspective of someone without supernatural ability, the scope of this was almost beyond belief, like something from science fiction or fantasy.

In any case, thinking back on the video we saw yesterday, Shirayuki's badminton-like kidoujutsu had certainly failed her.

If a similar phenomenon presented itself before Tamamo or Jeanne, then Deen's fighting strength would decrease dramatically.

"Spoken differently, current conditions naught but troublesome. Were we to engage in battle, perchance it is we who face destruction."

"So what do you suggest we do, Tamamo?"

"We entice them."

"What?"

"First GIII, and then GIV - we shall entice them to join Deen."

"What're you...saying?"

"In 'Warfare', persuading a powerful 'neutral' or 'unaffiliated' party to join is most advantageous. This is no different from true war."

"Stop playing around! How do you plan on convincing people like that to join us?"

"The methods of persuasion are not limited to just dialogue. From time immemorial, money, power, sex, and more have been used to achieve this goal. There have even been times when those seeking these benefits have loudly proclaimed their neutrality. There is a terribly rude saying which goes, 'If you wish to catch a fox, use aburaage.' [2] If we can but discover what it is GIV desires, perchance she may yet join us in Deen."

What she likes?

As I tilted my head in thought, Watson raised her pumpkin head.

"Tohyama, regarding this, there's something we need to discuss."

"What's up?"

"Well, that GIV girl, yesterday in the car, talked over and over about how happy she was to finally meet you. To be honest, it was to the point where even I started to feel embarrassed. In other words, she seems to like you a lot."

"And your point is? You want me to sneak up on her?"

"No, no. What I mean is, to put it simply, Romeo."

"Romeo?"

I just about upturned my cup of Oolong.

This Romeo was a Butei term, referring to male seduction.

In order to deal with women difficult to overcome through direct

conflict, they would instead send attractive men to get close to them...

And via seduction, get the opponent to either change sides or give up classified information.

The level of difficulty surpassed that of normal seduction, and Tokyo Butei High offered no courses in this specialization. Actually, if I remembered correctly, with the exception of Berlin and Bangkok, no Butei schools "anywhere" taught this.

It goes without saying that I haven't the least clue how to go about doing such a thing. Because of my HSS-ridden physiology, I've never so much as glanced at titillating material.

In any event, throwing this kind of thing at me, you're not that normal either, are you, Watson?

"Cut the crap, pumpkin head. Baskerville's been attacked and directly victimized by GIV. Even setting that aside, with regards to that dangerous individual-"

"Do you have any other ideas? This is all we're left with. Anyway, even if you don't look the part, in reality, you're quite proficient at tempting women, right? If we count, starting from Aria, there's Shirayuki, Riko, Reki, and who knows who else."

After Watson had finished speaking, her voice biting with sarcasm, the others...Um, about that...

Why are you all looking at me?

It's almost like you're looking at a habitual offender.

"Wow. That many, huh? You are truly Kana's brother; you seem most popular."

Hey Meiya, mind not using that awe-inspired tone of respect here?

In a plea for help, I turned to Jeanne, only to find a similar aura of complete misunderstanding in her eyes as she said, "Go get 'em."

"That's how it is. One of Tohyama, we entrust this task to thee."

"That's how...wait a moment, what do you mean 'That's how it is'! What do you want from me!"

"Go forth and befriend GIV. Care well for her, and bringest her into Deen. Peradventure, this will determine the life or death of this group. Labor most diligently!"

Tamamo sipped the last of her melon soda, and spoke these words.

Irritated beyond endurance, I gripped the table's edge, and prepared to use the technique which had been passed down by my grandfather, namely «Table Flip».

"Tohyama-san, at dusk, I- sorry, it should be late last night for you - also saw the video of GIV's attack."

Meiya's sweet, light-hearted voice interrupted my plans.

"I feel she's a very dangerous opponent to approach directly. Accordingly, we must first set about obtaining permission from the Paladins, in order to arrange for the manufacture and distribution of support supplies and the like."

"Support supplies?"

I asked the laptop that I had originally planned on flipping along with the table.

"Correct. I think even if we can't fight to win, we can at least safeguard ourselves."

"This is good, one of Tohyama."

"Good luck, Tohyama. When this is all over, make sure to report back with all the juicy details."

"Tohyama, I leave the rest to you. I need to return to care for Aria and the others."

Looking at Meiya, Tamamo, Jeanne, and Watson delivering their

lines one at a time, as if in a play...

(Tch, these bastards...)

Undoubtedly, they'd all planned this before my arrival.

It seems from the start, they'd already decided to make handling GIV my responsibility. Damn it!

Ah, it really makes me wholeheartedly regret being even just a little late.

Never again will I be late. In fact, now that I think about it, wasn't the reason why I ran into Aria and had to experience such trying times because I was late and missed the bus?

After being tricked by everyone, or rather, after having the meeting proceed exactly as they had planned...

As a parting shot, I'd flipped Tamamo along with the donation box she carried on her back end-over-end, crying "What good luck, give me that back", taking back the 10 yen coin I had previously thrown in. As everyone simultaneously decried my childishness, I turned and headed for the hospital.

Aria, Shirayuki, Riko, and Reki, just how are they doing?

I gave a call to Soumiya, in charge of treating Haimaki, telling her, "This Butei dog is Reki's, so settle any questions of cost with her," to which she responded that he was no dog, but a wolf. I ignored what she said, instead continuing to ask after the condition of the four. It seems they're doing well, and are close to regaining consciousness.

(Let's set aside what we talked about at the meeting for the moment; visiting the injured comes first.)

Accordingly, I bought a few peach buns and Calorie Mates, and rode the elevator to the third floor of the A-wing where they were.

rustle...

rustle rustle...

(...?)

rustle rustle rustle...

On the hallway floor...*rustle rustle*...a metal tray was moving.

It's abundantly clear there's no one here, but the tray was moving nonetheless.

Under normal circumstances, this sight would frighten someone near to death-

Unfortunately, it's sad to say I've already grown accustomed to seeing such an unnatural scene. My only reaction was mild surprise, and an offhanded "So this kind of thing exists too...", before casually watching the tray.

The tray was a polished, shiny bronze, covered in etchings of thorny vines and spiders...even though it was pretty terrifying, it was likely an antique.

The objects placed upon it seemed to be a paper carton of strawberry milk, a box of Pocky, and a croissant. It's all cheap stuff! Wait a moment, this is all stuff Riko loves.

(Hmm...?)

Underneath the tray seems to be a shadow just a mite larger than the tray itself. This is definitely also out of the norm.

I finally grasped its true nature.

"Hilda?"

Hearing my question, the tray suddenly froze.

It ever so slowly turned in my direction (oh, I didn't realize that way was facing front), before returning to face its original direction,

and slid helter-skelter at full speed down the hall.

Moving at a pace similar to that of a person running, it turned the corner.

Since Aria and the others were in the same direction, I followed along behind the tray.

As expected, I saw Hilda.

She'd planned on escaping down the stairs only to realize she couldn't take the stairs while hiding in the shadow of the tray. She emerged from said shadow just in time for me to arrive. From the way things look, this seemed to be the case.

She traveled down one flight of stairs, before stopping in place.

What was particularly confusing was what she did next. Hilda, wearing a nurse's outfit, with her back to the wall, flicked open an ostrich feather fan, and covered her face.

What...What to say about this?

"Hey."

I called out to her.

"..."

She pretended not to hear.

"Hey, Hilda."

"...Who, who did you ask for? Haven't you got the wrong person?"

"Like there's anyone else strange enough to carry an ostrich feather fan? Are you feeling better?"

Hearing this, *bang!* Hilda closed her fan.

"Oh, if it isn't Tohyama?"

She's pretending like she just noticed...

"What a coincidence, meeting here. I *just* came up these stairs."

What's the point in lying?

A glance was all it took to tell how flustered she was, but that didn't stop Hilda from putting on a cool expression and turning to face me, her shoes clicking against the floor.

She was wearing a pair of white, high-heeled shoes.

(Actually, why is she dressed up as a nurse? It's pretty unbelievable, not to mention what kind of nurse wears high-heels?)

As I pondered this, frowning in the direction of Hilda's feet, she had the mistaken impression that I was staring at the tray at her feet, leading to...

"What's this? How, how unexpected. To have fallen here, completely by chance. A tray, it seems?"

Her cheeks blushing, she rattled off a load of nonsense.

This girl's ability to leave someone utterly mystified is no less than that of Aria's.

(...?)

I pondered for a moment.

This Spark Witch, the vampire Hilda had fought with Aria, Riko, and I last month, and suffered injuries grievous to the point of near-death, before being sent to this hospital.

At the time, she'd nearly died from massive blood loss, but thankfully, Riko's donated blood was able to save her life.

(And now, this tray seems to be full of things that Riko likes, and moreover, for her to be delivering it so sneakily...)

Is it because this time it's Riko's turn to stay in the hospital that she's taken the opportunity to show her appreciation?

But to so vigorously protest "the one delivering this tray is absolutely not me", it seems like "thanking Riko" is quite an embarrassing thing for her?

That would be why she's dressed up as a nurse (even though her skill in disguises is pitiful), in order to allow her to move about unnoticed.

"What 'fallen here', you *brought* this here. To give to Riko."

I signified the tray, at which point Hilda realized the gig was up.

Her entire face turned red as she blushed.

Her skin color is naturally white, perhaps she's originally Caucasian? In any case, because of this, the fact that her face was now all pink stood out all the more.

"Not, not a chance!"

"Moreover, aren't these all things that Riko likes?"

"-Tohyama! Seeing as these have been discarded here, they don't belong to anyone anymore. You should pick them up."

I was only just teasing, but her frown filled me with fear.

God forbid because of this she attack me with electricity or her ball lightning.

"Alright. I'm picking it up."

Taking the tray in my hands, I prepared to hand it back to her.

Except she wasn't willing to take it from me, instead turning her face from me with great gusto.

"Just make it so that that's stuff you bought."

"Why? Can't you just bring them to her yourself? Honestly, you're so roundabout."

"Stop talking so much and do as I asked. Right now, you're the only

servant I can rely on."

"At what point did I become your servant?"

"This too, give this to her as well."

From who knows where, Hilda fished out a black, garbage-looking thing which she placed on the tray.

It looked like a piece of charcoal, a thin wire running through it shaped like an S.

"What's this?"

"Roast salamander."

"Gross!"

"-This rude servant! This is a reward bestowed by Countess Dracula, just what do you take it for!"

Snap! She rapped me on the head with her fan.

"That is the cure-all medicine I spent all night preparing. Give that to Riko."

"You just exposed yourself as having prepared this for Riko, you know?"

"Uuuu-!"

Seeing Hilda's eyes grow large, I couldn't help but sigh.

Unbelievable.

Aria is the same. So is Watson. Don't tell me it's a rule that aristocrats must all be this bad at expressing themselves?

"Toh-, Tohyama. Don't misunderstand. It's because- because I had no choice. In compliance with the rules of 'Warfare', as a captive noble, I have no choice in the matter. Don't get the wrong idea."

"And that's why I've been saying, if you want to apologize to Riko, just do it."

"Uhh, if the opportunity arises, we'll see."

Failing to reject the notion of her apologizing, she doesn't seem to have realized that she has again misspoken.

This girl...From Informa's perspective, she's undoubtedly an E-class.

No, actually, she should be even worse than that, perhaps even the rarely-seen F-class?

"What do you mean 'if the opportunity arises'? Who knows when that will be? Why don't I keep you company, and we'll go together?"

"No can do. I...still can't face her. To be honest, I want to go, but, right now, it's still..."

Hilda shook her head like a willful child.

Her twin drill pigtails, like Aria's, shook like a rattle drum. Due to their spring-like structure, however, shaking her head results in far more extended motion as compared to Aria. This reached the point where Hilda extended her hands to hold her hair in place.

"-Returning to the topic at hand, Baskerville was really beaten quite savagely."

Having recovered her usual stern demeanor, she changed the topic.

"It doesn't matter who the opponent is- If the team that previously defeated me loses, this disgrace reflects upon me as well. Tohyama, the ones who did this, you want to deal with them thoroughly, yes?"

What to say, this really seems to fit Hilda's style, this way of forcing things down other's throats.

"At the moment, because of the issue with Ririirokane, I'm hardly in peak condition. Notwithstanding, given some time to recover- If Riko faces any danger, contact me immediately. I will flay and skewer whoever it is."

Having finished what she had to say, she turned, and heels clicking all the way, descended the stairs.

As she exited-

From the back of her uniform, I saw two holes appear, through which a pair of tiny black wings extended. It seems the wings that Riko had severed have started growing once more.

Since today was Halloween, no one thought twice about her "costume", but I simply thought, ah, she really isn't human.

Looking carefully, around her neck she still carries the cross that Watson placed there.

A vampire that wears a cross...reality and the movies sure are different.

"From dusk until dawn- leave things to me. If it's you, and I'm in a good mood, it's not like I couldn't lend a hand."

At this double negative that Hilda threw out as she exited the stairwell back into the hall, I couldn't help but sigh.

Suddenly, from where the stairway broke line-of-sight to the hall-

(Riko...!)

I saw a forehead, arm, and thigh, covered in bandages, leaning

against the wall.

She'd tied her sawed-off shotgun, the Winchester M1887, to her back with a belt.

From here, her profile was visible, her gaze directed this way.

"...Did you hear that?"

"Yes."

"Then take all of this. It's what Hilda brought for you."

I handed the tray to Riko.

She glanced at its contents: strawberry milk, Pocky, roast salamander, etc., before dusting herself off, grabbing the hem of her skirt with one hand like a bag, and filling it with the items atop the tray.

"And what do you think, Riko? It seems Hilda wants to get along with you."

"What a load of garbage. She's killed me once before, like that's something so easily forgiven."

Her mouth said one thing, her hands another. How very Riko-like.

What she said, however, is valid. Reconciliation after intensely striving against one another is not such an easy thing. This I truly understand, since my feelings regarding GIV are similar.

That said...

"Hadn't you tried to shoot me in the head before? In April, during the airplane hijacking. At that time, if I hadn't split your bullet with my knife, right now my name would be engraved on the Butei High Memorial Wall."

"Stop whining, Kinji. I only fired because I knew that Hystekin could handle anything."

Riko forcefully bit down on the straw for her milk, glaring at me all the while.

Hystekin? Oh, I see. In short, Kinji in Hysteria Mode.

Riko, who would use nicknames even for something like this, was actually eating the roasted salamander, alternating bites with gulps of her strawberry milk.

Looks like she's not the least bit skeptical of the food being poisoned.

In many ways, it seems she's quite confident in Hilda's pride as a noble.

"That girl Hilda sure is free. She's already brought stuff a few times already, but always unseen. So strange."

Riko spoke while stealing a glance in my direction.

What do you want me to say?

"Um...Well, why don't you both cool off a bit?"

"..."

"Anyway, she's basically admitted she's now a part of Deen. We are now participating in 'Warfare', which, for all intents and purposes, might as well be a real war. Even if she's that kind of person, but with that kind of power at her disposal, why not use her well? I'm not going to go so far as to demand you become the best of friends, but at the very least, please don't quarrel for no reason, ok?"

I copied what Tamamo had said to me, and after contradicting myself with my own words-

Riko turned around, back towards me, noisily finishing her strawberry milk with a *slurp*, before nodding her head once.

She then spun back around to face me, and full of pretense, saluted.

"Don't let it trouble you anymore, Kii-kun. Riko will now lead you

to the girls' room, A-Wing, room 303!"

"Just gonna skip past what we were talking about before, huh."

"Ayaya is here too!"

"Ayaya...? Oh, Hiraga-san? What for?"

"Fufufu. It's a surprise."

A surprise...?

I've got a bad feeling about this.

When all is said and done, Riko's "surprises" have never been something I've been happy to see.

Riko pulled me, full of trepidation, towards Room 303...

"...!"

First, the silhouette of a wolf entered my peripheral vision.

Laying on the white hospital bed was the Lone Wolf girl, accompanied by a real wolf.

She wore her normal uniform, on her head a headset, but also a pair of wolf ears. Haimaki's appearance was unchanged.

In Reki's hand was a half-eaten Calorie Mate, on her face, the usual blank expression.

Aside from a few bandages on her thighs, she didn't seem to have any other external injuries. For the time being, I felt relieved.

"Uhuhuhu. No matter how many times I see it, it's still as cute as ever Rekyu! Your costume is adorable!"

Riko threw out a real tongue-twister as she grabbed Reki in a hug.

[3]

There's no way Reki thought of wearing those ears on her own...

This was probably the result of Riko assisting Reki, who had likely put no thought into a costume.

"Look, look, Kii-kun. There's even a tail!"

From underneath Reki's skirt, Riko pulled out a fake wolf tail. Reki, of course, gave no reaction whatsoever, but her skirt had been lifted to the point it was almost dangerous-

"The important thing here is, that is, where'd this come from?"

I frantically turned my gaze to look at the large sniper rifle beside the bed.

If at all possible, I wanted to avoid looking at that thing- a Barrett M82.

It was a long range sniper rifle used even in the war in Iraq.

"I purchased it from Amdo's Hiraga-san."

"Why on earth would you buy such a crazy thing?"

"In order to oppose the enemy encountered yesterday,"

Reki replied in an emotionless tone.

Even so, this is a formidable sniper rifle which employs 12.7x99mm rounds, you know?

Even being grazed by a shot could kill someone; a direct hit would probably blow them to pieces.

"This is an anti-materiel rifle. Is it not forbidden by international law?" [4]

(...)

She didn't bother to reply.

Nor did she nod. She simply focused her gaze on me.

...She's serious.

"Fufufu. If you read the terms carefully, it never specifies that 50 caliber rounds aren't allowed, Kii-kun."

In response to Riko, whom, harboring evil intent, squinted her double eyelids,

"That's not the main issue here. That would be Butei Law, Article 9. To be honest, Riko, that shotgun of yours is also not something a Butei should have. In a situation where you absolutely cannot kill, there's no way to fire that gun."

I spoke for a bit longer. The result-

From Riko and Reki both, *pa*.

They handed me a sheet of A4 sized paper each.

"What is this?"

It was a firearms permit from the Ministry of Public Security firearms inspection division.

...Unexpectedly, they have permission! And both of them!

"This is impossible. These have got to be fake!"

"Ayaya's work is without flaw. Nothing is imposssible!"

Pulling back the hospital bed curtains as she made her appearance was Amdo's Hiraga-san.

Those clothes she's wearing ought to be her Halloween costume, I believe? She wore a pumpkin-colored shirt, a black mantle, with pumpkin-shaped shorts or trousers.

Her hair was even held in place with mini-pumpkin ties. Such a cute child.

"Beginning just this month, Ayaya is willing to act as a surrogate for all firearm applications! Fuhahaha!"

...You're laughing like you won the lottery there, Hiraga-san.

My guess is...about 80 percent of that business is probably helping people obtain permission to use illegal firearms. Of course, that's

where the money is.

"What perfect timing Tohyama-kun. Come! Here's the left part of 'Orochi'!"

I took the glove from her.

A few days earlier, I'd borrowed money from my grandparents in Sugamo to pay Hiraga-san with.

In short, I'd bought on credit. I still needed to find a way to pay them back as soon as possible.

"Ooh. Thank you very much."

Um, Hiraga-san. You didn't just pull this Orochi out of those pumpkin pants, did you?

"Speaking of which, Tohyama-kun, didn't you ask before about a wire anchor?"

"Yeah, that's right. Did you find one?"

I'd run into Hiraga-san a few days prior in the cafeteria, and had raised the question.

Having learned my lesson from the fight with Watson, where I'd nearly fallen to my death, I'd asked if she'd find me a safety cable that could be hidden.

"Here, this is a prototype. Though I can't make any guarantees, this is still a pretty revolutionary design!"

Again from within her pumpkin pants, Hiraga-san pulled something out. I sure hope there are pockets in there...

She'd handed me a small vinyl, ziplock bag, within which were bullets, but definitely no wires?

"They seem to be 9mm Lugers?"

"Though the speed is slow, but yep! This is an anchor wire which

you fire from a gun «Anchor»!"

"A wire you fire from a gun...?"

"Exactly. As this bullet exits the muzzle, it splits into two, a pellet that resists air and another that shoots forward. As the former encounters the air, its mechanism will activate, trapping it within the gun barrel for around two seconds. At the same time, the latter flies forward, adhering to the target point with carbon particles."

Hiraga-san explained the construction of the bullet while wildly gesticulating like a small child.

"And? Why does this work as a wire anchor?"

"Between the two halves is a diphase liquid aramid fiber. When the halves separate, they create a long filament, like pulling taffy." [5]

So, in other words, firing this bullet creates a length of chemical fiber to the target point?

"There shouldn't be any problems with tensile strength, right?"

"A width of a single micron can support a weight of two tenths of a ton. Even if it become as slender as a string of pulled natto, it should be just fine. Liquid aramid fiber is a creation of Kyoto Synthetics, though the combination with the bullet is an Ayaya original, patent pending."

Patent pending...Hiraga-san really knows how to earn money.

She might just become a millionaire in the future.

"In order to grasp the timing, why don't you fire a few practice rounds? The air resistant pellet's been covered with a paint that releases light in reaction to pressure. After you've fired, just follow the blue light. Its advised range is 25 meters or less, at 50 meters, the filament risks snapping."

In the midst of Hiraga-san's explanation-

"Kin-chan...?"

"Shi, Shirayuki?"

From my side Shirayuki appeared, dressed in an angel getup - though with her navel exposed.

On her back were two mini-wings, and a matching miniskirt; from top to bottom, the only thing that wasn't "mini" was that chest of hers, which threatened to spill out of her tubetop.

Atop the white ribbon she normally wore on her head, was a golden angel's halo made of wire. Though it looked pretty foolish...

What kind of costume was this?

Like hell there are such sexy angels in Heaven. If there are, then it'd be hell anyway, at least for me.

Shirayuki adopted an embarrassed, feminine pose,

"This, this set of Halloween clothes was prepared by Riko. Um..."

Those twin peaks just about to burst out of their nylon coverings...

Were quickly covered by the gun she held in hand.

Nononono. What you need to cover first is not your chest! I take that back, cover them both up!

As I was about to blurt this out for both my and Shirayuki's sakes-

I saw that which had not been seen for some time, Shirayuki's huge M60 machine gun, and was struck dumb.

The M60 - America's favorite general purpose machine gun.

Even though it was referred to in the same vein as guns like the Uzi, but in truth, they were worlds apart. This gun was intended for use in war!

Though its design was a bit dated given its age, but usage in the Vietnam War ranged not just from infantry but even to helicopters. It's the gun which has caused the single most bloodshed in the

world.

Pushing Riko, who'd shouted "Yuki-chan is a true angel!", madly snapping photos left and right, to the side,

"Shirayuki, it's not me who's telling you not to use that. It's the law!"

"But Hiraga-san helped me get my permit. In any case, Irokane Ayame's been stolen..."

Covering the lower half of her face with her machine gun, her eyes seemed to repeat, "But, but..."

Up to this point, it could still be considered quite adorable. Unfortunately...

"...Furthermore, that whore..."

Her eyes, piercing, narrowed like shamshirs, making me doubt my own eyes. What, what kind of expression is this? Her voice has even lowered a full octave.

"Wh-whore? Do you mean the one who attacked you...GIV?"

"-That person is strange! As we fought, she kept saying over and *over* that she is the existence closest to Kin-chan! Completely incomprehensible, isn't it? Absolutely inconceivable, right? Kin-chan? AhahahaHAHAHAHAHA- Simply insanity, isn't it?!"

Shirayuki's eyes glazed over, as she gripped her machine gun and loosed a wild, mad laughter.

Just which gate is this angel guarding? The unimaginable one here is you!

"Hey, Reki
Hehi
, Shirayuki
Hirafuki
, Riko
Hiko
, look, look
hook, hook
. That Fedex package just now was «Pastel»."

All of a sudden, a voice, half muffled by a peach bun, drifted over...

This time, making her appearance was, of course, Aria, a pair of twin swallowtail butterfly wings springing forth from her back.

"-ehh, Kinji? What's wrong with you! If you're going to come, it's the least you can do to let us know first!"

Trading stares with me, Aria frantically straightened her clothes.

She seemed to be dressed as a fairy, not unlike Disney's Tinkerbell, though her dress was pink instead. Riko probably made the decision in order to match her hair.

It was almost like watching dress-up in a kindergarten, the look well suited the tiny Aria. Still...

(...Even though this is a hospital, she's still wearing her guns...)

From between the teeth of her sawtooth-edged skirt, her large Government pistols revealed themselves.

This kind of fighting fairy, my guess is Walt Disney wouldn't approve? Her fellow fairies would undoubtedly pelt her with sticks and stones.

On another note, this fairy girl's chest seems to be even flatter than normal. Since her dress is strapless, it seems the pushup bra she normally relies on is not an option.

(...Still, what to make of this...)

All of you, to be willing to room with Riko, you have only yourself to blame.

I'm sure Riko simply took full advantage of Halloween as an excuse to dress everyone up as dolls.

As I was ruminating on Riko being the perpetrator of these events, I noticed a cardboard box aside her shotgun on the bed... I could see at least an obake and a mahou shoujo outfit, which had been haphazardly thrown aside. It seems many different outfits had been tried on since this morning.

It seems she'd already had her fill of Halloween, at least as far as dressing up by herself goes. What a free spirit this girl was.

"You seem lively enough, Aria. I'm not going to say my concern on your behalf was wasted, since I knew beforehand that about 70 percent of the norm was more than enough."

"What are you talking about? Like you could do anything that skillful."

Pretending as if she had no ulterior motive, Aria folded her arms, hiding her chest from view.

"More importantly, Kinji. Have you received «Cocktail» yet? By the way, my set's name is «Pastel»."

"Cocktail? Pastel? What on earth are you talking about?"

Seeing my frown, Aria handed me what appeared to be a crayon box.

"«DALM
Butei Bullet magazine
». We just received a care package from the Vatican. Because your 9mm Lugers are so small, producing them will require more time."

Aria spoke as she opened the box before her...

Contained within were what almost did seem to be crayons - .45 ACP bullets of every color.

Engraved below the coat of arms of the Vatican - «The Key of Saint Peter
The Keys of Heaven
» - were some words in Italian that I was unable to decipher. Regardless, if they were as required by international law, I nonetheless knew what they read - DAL (Detective Armed Lethal), or Butei bullets.

The so-called Butei bullets were specialized bullets with added functionality.

Looking carefully, in addition to the bullets I'd used on the IU in the battle with Sherlock, grenade bullets, there were armor piercing and fragmentation bullets, as well as scatter shot, in addition to other lethal weaponry. Even included were the bullet types used in the battle between Reki and Koko - flash, cannon, smoke grenade, and flare - as well as other non-lethal bullets of every kind imaginable.

It seems «Pastel» referred to these sets of Butei bullets.

These must be those support supplies Meiya had mentioned earlier.

This is simply ridiculous, sending this kind of thing as a care package to a hospitalized patient. Can't you guys send snacks or fruit or those sorts of things?

"Those Italian gun makers sure know what they're doing. It really makes me want to do a study abroad at least once."

Amdo's Hiraga-san seemed enthralled by those bullets.

I just remembered, aren't Butei bullets prohibitively expensive?

To casually send these over, the Catholic Church sure isn't lacking for money, is it?

"That reminds me, all of you...loading up on ammo, applying for weapons permits, this is a hospital! Can't you just rest, like normal?"

After I chided those assembled-

"This is training camp. Always being the one attacked is no fun."

"The existence closest to Kin-chan has to be me! That kind of woman is no good, no good at all!"

"Fufufu. This kind of girls' gathering is just way too fun. Riko can hardly contain herself."

"Buteis always return an eye for a eye."

If I were to sum up Aria, Shirayuki, Riko, and Reki's arguments-

Simply put, due to having been thoroughly trounced by GIV, under the direction of Aria's aggression, Shirayuki's nonsensical wrath, Riko's desire for fun, and Reki's sense of professional duty-

The four had joined hands to seek retribution.

(...This is bad...)

For the time being, regardless of my feelings on the matter, Deen's group decision had been to bring GIII and GIV into the fold.

Unfortunately the four in front of me are just itching for a fight.

"Kinji, you help too. I've also ordered a jetpack from Hiraga-san."

"I can't take this anymore. Ugh. Aria, come over here for a bit."

In order to discuss things seriously, I grabbed the vice-captain of Baskerville, our little fairy, by her wings, and pulled her off to the side.

I closed the curtain with a *clang*,

"Wh, wh, what's going on here? What do you think you're doing? Everyone's here!"

Aria frantically muttered something I couldn't understand.

"Aria. I know how the defeat by GIV has all of you feeling pretty discontent. Truth be told, if it were up to me, I'd like to go after them as well. That notwithstanding, as opponents, they're just too much for us. Consequently, just now, Jeanne, and Watson, and..."

"Kinji. The fact that our enemies are strong is something I understand very well. That's why we're having this training camp!"

Saying this, Aria climbed onto the bed like a young child, and reaching her hand through a crack in the curtain, pulled a letter over.

(...Ugh...)

Just...just now, when Aria had climbed onto the bed, her bottom facing me...

From beneath the miniskirt of this wondrous fairy pose...

Pink bloomers, completely exposed.

Fortunately, since their color matched her clothes, my brain seemed

to register it as just a part of the rest of her clothes. Aria's actions seemed to show she thought similarly, so I didn't experience any problems with a sudden rise in blood pressure.

Even still, how horrid. Just too cute! Even if only on the outside, this girl was just too cute.

"Look here. This is the letter from the Vatican. Although it's written in Italian, but this part reads, 'One DALM set to Tohyama Kinji under the name «Cocktail».' My guess is they must have sent them pretty soon after. You didn't happen to sell them because you didn't have any money?"

"Like...like hell!"

"Why are you looking away? Look into my eyes and repeat that!"

"Ignore that for a moment! As leader of this Baskerville team, I'm ordering you not to fight with GIII and GIV. I have no idea why it is they've decided to join this 'Far East Warfare', but at this time, they're neither Deen nor Grenada. That's why, this is the decision of Tamamo and the others- we are to convince GIII and GIV to join us in Deen."

"-What kind of crap are you spewing? That girl ambushed us!"

Thump! Aria bared her canines and stomped on the ground.

Her swallowtail butterfly wings clapped as she raged. Mutiny!

"They're the enemy! It's so completely obvious! If I can't open holes in their bodies, how am I supposed to calm myself down? And then you say you even want them to join us? Fool! Moron! Just how

stupid can you get, idiot Kinji!"

"Hey! Ow! Stop that! Don't always resort to violence!"

Retreating from Aria, whose wings continued to clap, as she chased me with chained hits, I fell backwards onto the bed-

"Wah!" "Yah!"

At that moment, Riko and Shirayuki's yelps of surprise came from the other side of the curtain.

I'd been thinking they'd been too quiet...

"-?"

Aria and I ran out from behind the curtains, quickly taking in the room environment.

What we found in the entrance to the room was-

"GIV...!"

That girl, standing there!

GIV wore a Butei High sailor uniform as if nothing was out of the ordinary, giving off a completely different impression from the armor/underwear combination from before.

Now she completely looks the part of a normal, female middle-school student.

"Like a moth to the flame! Get her, Yuki-chan! Rekyu!"

"Exactly right! Kin-chan, get back. Ricochets could be dangerous."

"..."

grumble grumble grumble

Riko raised her shotgun, Shirayuki, her machine gun, and Reki, her sniper rifle-

From three different directions, muzzles all turned to point at GIV.

"Whaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat's going on here?! If you're going to open fire, please wait until Ayaya's not in the room!"

Hiraga-san dove for dear life underneath the bed, tearfully crying out- and to be honest, I want to do the same.

GIV, on the other hand-

As if completely unaware of the guns pointing right at her, displayed a blinding smile, so much like the bloom of fresh flowers.

Towards me.

Her expression seemed so radiant as to even banish the thick aura of bloodlust which permeated the air.

In a flash, the space around her seemed to instead radiate life, carefree innocence, and purity.

A smile that stole away not only the desire to fight from the four around her, but nay, even their very souls.

GIV's demeanor, which seemed to all present to be that of an innocent young girl, led even Aria to reconsider whether or not to holster her weapons, as she took a quick step in my direction.

"I've finally found you, Onii-chan. Let's go, I'm hungry."

Grabbing my arm tightly, she forcefully leaned her weight against me.

To an outsider, we'd look like terribly close siblings, or even lovers.

"Ki, Kii-kun? What's the meaning of this...? Onii-chan...?"

"It, it, it can't be. Ki, Ki, Ki, Kin-chan's...imo....Kimouto? Imo, imouto-san?"

Though Riko and Shirayuki were utterly and thoroughly shocked, mouths agape, but without a doubt, the one who experienced the

greatest shock by far was me.

"Not, not a chance! Like I have a little sister! Ever since yesterday, just saying whatever you want!"

I desperately denied her claim, which only made her grab me all the tighter, burying my arm in her chest.

(Uwah...!)

As I fell under the spell of the soft feeling enveloping my arms-

GIV flipped around in front of me-

"-!"

In order to understand what had just happened to me, I froze for a few seconds.

Just now, my lips had been touched by something soft, like the petals of a flower.

From GIV's chestnut, bob cut hair...

A sweet, caramel-like smell drifted deeply into my nostrils.

"-So that's a kiss...However, just that isn't enough,"

GIV murmured as she released my lips.

(...!)

Nya～ Aria let out an anime-ish sound.

Hiiii! Shirayuki loosed a shriek.

Uooooh! Riko panted excitedly.

Reki...'s companion, Haimaki, growled in surprise.

As these sounds mixed together-

(What...what just happened...!?)

I just about had a heart attack, and not just because of what had just happened with GIV.

Even in the face of all that had just happened, my blood pressure hadn't budged an inch. I was shocked.

What just happened...shouldn't it clearly have triggered Hysteria Mode?

In the past, whether it was Aria, Shirayuki, Riko, or Reki, the same response had happened each and every time.

But even after coming into direct contact with this girl in front of me-

I was decidedly *not* in Hysteria Mode.

I clearly needed to speak more with this girl, beautiful as a gemstone.

"Now I see...I'd always thought it strange, why would you help speak on behalf of your enemy?"

...*SNARL*...

Hearing the familiar howl of a small lioness, I timidly turned around.

"...KINJI! Are you turning on us!?"

"...Huh...?"

I confusedly glanced around as GIV continued to tightly cling to my arm.

Aria's face flushed red, her camellia irises hung wide, and her pink twin-tails trembled.

I'd originally thought Shirayuki had perished straight away, but she lay on the white hospital bed, where she'd fainted. Riko wore a bitter smile full of ill intent, and the look in Reki's eyes could freeze a man cold.

"Whether or not she's truly your sister, it doesn't change the fact that she's the Achilles heel responsible for your betrayal!"

The fairy which had quickly transformed into a crimson demon drew her gun, and took aim at me.

"Wha, what Achilles heel!"

"-Women! You, you ass! You and, and, and, that woman! Did that! And then you betrayed us!"

Aaaaaaa!

Aria screamed and shouted euphemisms I couldn't decipher, as she grew angrier and angrier.

This girl...she's already grouped GIV and I together as enemies!

"How horrible, Kii-kun! This is really too impressive. One moment you're all kissy-kissy and then the next you're angry, and then all of a sudden she's your little sister? What kind of eroge is this! Even Riko can't help but be attracted too."

Riko placed her forefingers over her head like horns, sputtering nonsense all the while, a sweat drop on her forehead.

In spite of her libertine views, for Riko to have had this sort of reaction- It seemed the act of kissing a self-proclaimed younger sister on the lips had lowered my standing in Baskerville, already at rock bottom, to being buried somewhere deep within the Earth.

This time, it doesn't matter what I say, it doesn't seem either Aria or Riko will listen to a word I say.

Having thought through to this point, I realized I needed reinforcements.

"Oi, Reki. Give me a hand, would you? These two have been so pushy-"

"I'm not too sure what's going on, but I currently have no desire to speak with Kinji-san."

Ev, even Reki...!

She finally decides to show her human side now of all times!?

(...ugh...)

Aria, Riko, Reki, and even Shirayuki - who, lying collapsed on the bed, had forced her eyes open - stared daggers at GIV (and me!), emanating a murderous aura.

I hope this is all just one big misunderstanding but-

Everyone's guns...doesn't it look like they're leaning more in my direction?

(No, no way!)

If things continue down this path...worst comes to worst, I may find myself riddled with holes. Me and GIV both.

"Just wait a second and I'll explain!"

As I screamed for dear life, I shoved GIV from behind, preparing to make my exit.

Right as we reached the door, suddenly-

GIV spun around to face the Baskerville girls.

She wore an expression which had taken a full 180 from the smile she'd shown me, just indescribably contemptuous.

"Oi, Runt. Two-Face. Fraud. Mute. I'm not sure what kind of romantic comedy you guys had going on here with Onii-chan, but..."

Carrying on with a tone not only utterly lacking in femininity, but one completely crass and masculine-

"Little sisters are best. *Nothing* comes between a brother and his younger sister. These sibling bonds are absolute, completely unlike any other relationship with girls."

She wielded her words like a machete, ruthlessly cutting down the competition.

...Um...What?

It seemed as if I wasn't the only one who wanted to ask that question. Aria and the other girls were similarly speechless.

"I've already looked through Onii-chan's room."

"Hey, just when did you..."

"You guys' stuff is all over the place! My sense of smell is very acute, just by the scent I can tell."

Smell...? What are you, a bloodhound?

"You guys...You've all lived in his room, haven't you! Living with girls who aren't family, this is unforgivable! Only those who share the same blood can live together, so that means you're all out! I'm going to help Onii-chan turn over a new leaf."

Having spoken her piece, "BAM!"

As if trying to break the door in half, GIV kicked the door shut.

This can't be true, right? There's no way that just happened.

There's just one thing I know for sure, the one thing that's been driving me insane. GIV. Is. Not. My. Sister!

For starters, our hair colors are different. This is a judgment method every first year Inquesta student learns: her natural hair color is clearly chestnut, as a quick glance at her eyebrows and eyelashes will reveal.

Her skin color is also slightly more pale than my own. Although at first glance her eyes seem black, but careful inspection exposes

patches of blue. Finally, her bone structure is much better than mine.

(But still...Aria and those guys...)

Why is everyone so simple!?

Easily falling for GIV's mad ramblings.

What's more, this and every other time, all my protests went in one ear, and out the other.

(...That's why I've always said, women are honestly...)

This deeply-rooted frustration with women-

Accompanied by ancient grudges bubbled forth from deep within my heart.

When in junior high, because girls had discovered my HSS-plagued physique, I'd been sorely taken advantage of.

Just like back then, the second I'd return to normal and stand up for myself, they'd gang up on me.

Girls are far more likely than guys to break out into mass hysteria the second something happens. Afterwards, they'd all focus their vitriol on me. All of my past experiences were like this.

Though people would probably say this was just the difference between men and women, it didn't change the fact that I was a victim.

Adding on, all of this definitely played a role in my devoted apathy- and Butei High was no different. Girls were always talking behind my back: "Oh, he's so gloomy", "What a waste of talent", "What a womanizer", etc.

I'm always getting screwed over by women. Maybe they hate my personality.

No, I should say that it's likely the case. After all is said and done,

there's more than enough evidence to attest to that.

"And? Where do you think you're going?"

As I left the hospital for the bus station to make my way home-

There was GIV, doing the exact same thing, following me as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

"Because I'm your little sister."

Saying this, she tried to lock arms with me.

"You were never my sister to begin with!"

As I roughly brushed her away, she looked at me, pain obvious in her eyes as they pled, "Why? Why act like this?"

Failing, she sneakily and tremblingly tried to hold my hand.

As I slapped her hand away with a *pa!*, she revealed the disgruntled expression of a child who'd failed to have her way.

"Why are you angry, Onii-chan? Cheer up. Hurray, hurray, Onii-chan!"

Her poor mood was quickly replaced by vim and vigor as she tried to raise my spirits.

She waved my sleeve, forcing herself to be strong in an effort to help me.

What on Earth is she doing?

"Look here. Just look at what you've done, asking me why I'm angry..."

"What I've done? What do you mean?"

"Not even the least bit of self-awareness, great. First you attack all of the girls from Baskerville. Then you say all that stuff that's tantamount to declaring war. This is all because of you calling yourself my little sister that they've pushed me away. Even though

I'm supposed to be the team leader, now I'm all alone."

"You're not alone, Onii-chan. From now on, I'll always be there for you. At a place closer to Onii-chan than anyone. Because I'm your sister, because I'm family. That's why there's no reason to be lonely."

GIV replied, raising her adorable face to look at me.

That baby face was innocent and guileless to the point it made one doubt whether or not what had transpired between her and the other girls was just a misunderstanding.

"I never said it was because I was lonely! It's because every time Aria misunderstands something, she goes on a rampage. Because every time, for God knows what reason, Shirayuki loses control. Riko just *has* to join in and add fuel to the fire each and every time. And Reki, she's always got to look at things in that strange way of hers. Having to deal with all of them all at once, what do you expect me to do from now on!?"

After hearing me finish my rant-

GIV appeared utterly mortified.

"Onii-chan, give me a moment."

Saying this, her skirt fluttered as she twirled and headed straight back to the hospital.

I was struck with a sense of foreboding, so I grabbed her wrist and called for her to stop.

"What do you think you're doing going back there?"

"You're always talking about those girls. As long as they're still around, you're going to keep worrying about them. That's why I definitely need to kill them. All of them. Give me five minutes or so, and we should be good."

"Kill, kill them- What the hell are you saying!?"

I used force in an attempt to pull her back towards me-

"But but-"

GIV's large eyes brimmed with tears.

"...!"

She's not faking.

She, for some unknown reason, is really crying because of some deep-seated resentment. At Aria and the others.

"Because all you do is talk about them! If they're no longer around, then you'll finally pay attention to me!"

(...!...)

Honestly, what is *wrong* with this girl?!

"Onii-chan is just too magnanimous- to show compassion even to those harpies. It's because of them that I still haven't had a chance to feel Onii-chan's affection! If they were to all disappear, I alone would enjoy Onii-chan's love!"

As she sobbed, she screamed, like a little child throwing a tantrum.

I grabbed her close, brow furrowed and said,

"The important thing here is I'm. Not. Your. Brother!"

"NO! Onii-chan is Onii-chan!"

I'm at my wit's end.

There's just no way to communicate with this girl.

"That's why Onii-chan has to live with only me! Love only me! If not, I'll crush all the members of Baskerville!"

"-!"

This girl is bad news. Even compared to Aria, she's bad news. She's insane.

There's no way I can let her run wild.

"-Stop! Don't look for them anymore!"

From the beginning, I've not been a person who gets stirred up very easily-

But that notwithstanding, my face, reflected on the nearby convenience store window, could only be described as furious.

Just like when my brother used to scold me.

"..."

GIV...

Puffed her cheeks *muuu*, and glared at me, eyes full of tears.

"...Fine, let's compromise. Promise me one thing?"

"...What?"

"I can stay at Onii-chan's side?"

At this proposed condition, I responded-

"...Do whatever you want."

GIV, having heard my answer, wiped her eyes dry with the back of her hand and then smiled once more.

Her cuteness seemed straight out of a shoujo manga, complete with flowers blooming in the background.

"-Can you promise me one more thing?"

"Did you not say 'one thing'?"

At my response, she turned again in the direction of the hospital. Left with no other choice, I spoke,

"Fine, fine. What is it you want me to promise you?"

"Buy me some caramel candy."

...Huh?

At my puzzled expression, GIV raised her hand and pointed at the convenience store.

As the topic suddenly changed from killing people, I was floored for a brief moment.

Even so, if something this small was all it took to ensure the wellbeing of Aria and the other girls, then so be it. I brought GIV into the store with me, and purchased some caramel candies for her.

"...Here you go."

I peeled the Famimart seal off the candy, and handed them to her.

Like a small cat being fed, in a flash, she seized the candy.

Tearing open the bag, she carefully pulled out a piece, and opened the wrapping paper with a fingernail, exactly like a young child.

No, in truth, she *is* a young child. She has to be what, two, three years younger than me?

"Here, one for Onii-chan."

Smiling innocently, she handed me a piece.

Despite not really wanting it, I popped the candy in my mouth, and prepared to board the bus.

Because of the large number of students on board, I let go of GIV's hand, but not my sense of caution. She, however, didn't so much as glance back in the direction of the hospital. It seems because I've promised to obey her conditions, she's willing to listen to me.

(Honestly, what an enigmatic person...)

I turned to board the bus. GIV, who it seemed had never taken the

bus before, timidly followed me on.

There were still quite a few passengers, so GIV and I grabbed the rail, rocking as the bus shook.

Given GIV's strange aversion to other male students, I was forced to accompany her where she stood, near the rear bus door, surrounded by female students.

And speaking of the other students...

It's readily apparent GIV is the center of attention.

Well, it's not like I can't understand. GIV is, after all, dressed in a Butei High sailor uniform.

Even though she was still a middle-school student, and thus not an actual member of Butei High, the fact that no one knew this, combined with her singular beauty, inevitably resulted in such a development.

The problem lay in her company.

I couldn't help but hear. As luck would have it, also seated on the bus were the second year girls Takane, Hayakawa, and Anesaki, the three from Connect who had always swiftly and extensively spread gossip behind my back. They whispered among themselves, "Looks like the playboy's switched girls again." "This time it's a middle-school student?" "It seems our earlier misgivings were well warranted." You guys sure are close. And what earlier misgivings?

"Hey, GIV."

I whispered to her ever so quietly. She tilted her head [?], clearly puzzled, as she lent me her ear.

"Why are you wearing the Butei High uniform? Doesn't this ruin your chances of people believing you're a transfer student?"

"All the Baskerville girls wear this, so I thought Onii-chan liked these kinds of clothes."

She laughed as she raised her head to look at me.

"Still, a transfer student. That idea's not half bad, Onii-chan. Mm. It's decided. I'll study at this school as well. Since I'm Onii-chan's little sister, I really should study up a little on Japanese culture."

And then uttered those words.

Talk about sticking your foot in your mouth. I'd shot myself in the foot this time, what transfer student.

She'll really do it. I'm not sure *how* she'll do it, but she's motivated if nothing else.

chitter-chatter...

(...Hmm?)

chitter-chatter chitter-chatter

There seemed to be a small commotion.

"Onii-chan?" "Did she just say 'Onii-chan'?" "There's no way Kinji's little sister would be that cute." "The situation seems to still be unclear." "But she definitely just said 'Onii-chan.'" "Is she really his sister?"

This is the worst. Those...idiots...!

Despite never registering a *thing* during class, and yet they seemed to have heard everything more than clearly enough just now.

"Hey, listen to me. This is, um, well, it's complicated. There's more to the story."

I was so flustered I didn't even know what I was saying anymore.

"Um, are you Tohyama-kun's little sister?"

Completely disregarding my existence, Connect's Takane went

straight to the source.

"That's right. I'm his younger sister."

GIV's smile was blindingly pure.

(...She said it...!)

Whaaaaaaat!

The bus erupted into chaos.

Everyone jumped out of their seats, and swarmed us like so many bees.

"Hey, stop pushing...!"

In order to protect that slender form, I pressed my hand against the bus door, with her in between.

GIV was so surprised by my actions that she simply froze.

"Can, can I ask what's the matter? I'm just like any other little sister, after all."

Though she was still quite stunned, it didn't stop her from deliberately emphasizing the words "little sister", throwing the girls in the back of the bus into an uproar. The boys in front also made a racket, *click click click*, as they wildly snapped photos.

Of course this included Takane and the other two as they completed the change into full interviewing frenzy.

"How old are you?" "14. I'm two years younger than Onii-chan." "Kinji's younger sister is. So. Cute." "I think Onii-chan's pretty dashing himself." "Your skin's so white! Almost like a mix." "That's because half my DNA is of Caucasian descent." "...? And? What are your interests?" "Major League Baseball." "Favorite phrase?" "Immoral."

Anyway, GIV. Using such polite language when in public? How pretentious.

In more ways than one, she's seized the initiative.

Tohyama Kinji has a younger sister.

At this moment in time, it's become the truth.

All of this seemed to be going as planned for GIV. As she was answering questions, she subtly and repeatedly interwove "Onii-chan" and "little sister" into her responses.

"-And what's your name?"

At this point, a girl threw out this question.

"Tohyama Gefo-"

I quickly covered her mouth as she nearly blurted out her real name.

-This idiot!

Tohyama GIV is such a weird name! At least make it "GIV Tohyama". No, I take that back, the problem isn't with the order in the first place! The real problem here is that the brother's name is clearly 100% Japanese, but the younger sister's name most decidedly isn't! This just makes an already inexplicable situation even more incomprehensible!

"Tohyama-kun! Why won't you let her answer!?"

"Exactly right! Kinji, her name! What's her name?!"

"We need to write it in the school paper. Hurry up and let her speak!"

As the bus just about began to riot, I racked my non-Hysteria Mode brain like my life depended on it.

"Uh...Um...Her name is...Uh..."

I need to think of a name that fits!

The Tohyama siblings' names are 金ー

Kinichi
and 金次
Kinji
, so a "金" is necessary. 金子
Kinko
? No, that's way too weird, like something from a hundred years ago. Think, think!, Kinji.

Looking at this from a different perspective, how about 金
Kana
, the kun'yomi reading? [6] But Kana is my older brother's name, so let's change that a little. What to change, though? Well, she's a girl, so how about adding the character for 女
girl
?

- 金女
Kaname
.

Not bad, at least it's a person's name now.

"Her, uh, her name is- Tohyama Kaname!"

"Ehh?"

Looking at me in surprise, I immediately hid GIV's expression from view with my hand.

"Tohyama Kaname!" "Kaname-chan!" "So cute!" "Kaname!" "Kaname!"

Calls of "Kaname!" filled the bus as it made its rounds around the campus island.

I felt their twisted stares on me.

What...what have I gotten myself into?

Fairly leaping off the bus at the next stop, I found myself at Logi's multi-story parking structure.

Looking around, I saw nary a soul in sight.

No, wait, there seems to be someone. A tall kouhai from Assault, holding a revolver, a S&W M....29, or maybe a 329 or 629, laying asleep on a bench.

She's covered in dirt. My guess is she lost a fight, and after laying down to rest for a moment, fell asleep. Her magnum revolver is out in the open, rather than holstered where it should be...truly a careless individual.

But, seeing as she's asleep, I don't think she'll be able to hear to us speak.

Having thus decided, I had GIV stand in front of me.

"Seriously, just what is it you want? After what you just did, that whole crowd-"

As I started to admonish her-

She suddenly hugged me.

-The smell of a young girl wafted over. With her sticking this closely to me, I felt the softness of her still immature breasts pressed against me.

With my senses of smell and touch under attack at the same time, I was left stunned.

"...Kaname...My name is...Kaname..."

Burying herself in my chest, her tearful voice wavered.

Unlike her tears of frustration earlier, these seemed to be tears of joy. What a strikingly emotional girl.

"Kaname...it's a name, isn't it? A person's name?"

"No kidding. It's not like you left me any choice but to pick one."

"My name...Onii-chan gave me a name. I'm so happy...so happy..."

"What, what's wrong with you now? What're you crying for?"

"Because I'm too happy."

"Happy? What for?"

"A name. A real name. I've never had one before. Onii-chan...gave me a name. This is the first time...I've ever been treated like a person. It's too much. It's just like I'd dreamed...My Onii-chan is such a kindhearted person."

"...huh?"

Just as I was about to call her GIV once more, I felt strongly... that I shouldn't use that name anymore.

I'm not sure why, but that's just how it feels.

(This sucks. Just what is going on...?)

In an effort to clear the raging emotions within, I shook my head forcefully.

Just from the sight of her tears, I'm this shaken up?

Women's tears...what the heck is up with that? Thanks to them, I've been vexed beyond reason.

No matter how many tears this girl sheds, I won't be moved.

This girl, there's no way she's my sister.

"I...I helped you choose a name only because I was left with no choice back there!"

Like Hell I have a little sister.

"You were never my sister. I-"

"-Nn, it's fine. I know Onii-chan won't acknowledge me, because...until now, I've already been rejected so many times. So yes, I know."

She looked at me, eyes brimming with tears, voice choked with sobs.

As if deeply wounded by my words just now, her eyebrows drooped sadly.

But just as before, she nevertheless laughed bravely.

As if to cry, "Say whatever you want to say, just don't hate me."

"Ah...no..."

Why? I know just how dangerous this girl is...but why?

Why can't I treat her with indifference?

Is it because she's a girl? Because she's younger than me?

I can't allow myself to do anything that would truly hurt her.

"Still...I beg you...just promise me one thing?"

"...What...?"

"Please call me 'Kaname' from now on. Don't use that serial number anymore. Even if only when we're alone, that's enough."

What to say to that?

Because of what had transpired, the name "Kaname" has already spread throughout school.

If I continued to call her "GIV", it's possible an already complicated situation would take a turn for the worse.

"...I understand."

"...!"

GIV- Kaname, just from my willingness to do this one thing-

Gave a glowing smile brimming with joy, her body trembling.

As if to directly feel that happiness, she rubbed her forehead against me.

"Onii-chan. I'm Kaname. My name is Kaname. Kaname. My name is Kaname."

Voice still choked, she continued to repeat her name over and over.

Is it really something to be that happy about? It's something I literally spent about five seconds thinking up.

If I'd known it was going to be like this, I'd have put more effort into it.

Seeing her raise her head to look at me, very much like a cat being petted, I couldn't help but feel a slight regret-

"...!"

From the hand of my kouhai, lying on the bench-

The pistol slipped off her body, and fell towards the ground.

"!"

Kaname-

Sprinting faster than humanly possible, she spun in that direction, diving with arms before her.

-Bang!

The pistol, having hit the floor, accidentally went off.

Right as I heard the sound of the gunshot-

Kaname's back suddenly crashed into my chest.

"...!"

...A bullet suddenly dropped to the floor at her feet.

"Uh...wha? Hey, are you alright!?"

Reacting to the loud and abrupt noise, my kouhai suddenly awoke.

"If I was anyone else, you'd be facing a murder charge right now, and at the very least, life in prison. Take that safety-less revolver of yours, and empty its chamber. If you leave now, I won't say a word."

Hearing GIV speak thusly,

The first year bowed her head repeatedly as if kowtowing before an empress, frantically picking up her S&W which had rolled away, and exited the scene in a hurry.

"Onii-chan, you're not hurt, are you? I'm sorry, I ran into you."

Kaname turned around, holding the chest of her sailor uniform where she'd been hit.

There's no way it doesn't hurt. Even if her uniform is made of bulletproof material, it was still a .44 magnum bullet that hit her, and it didn't just graze her either.

That kind of impact force, if unlucky, can easily break a rib or two. It could even be fatal.

"I'm the one who should be asking you that!"

"I'm alright. After all, I'm wearing these kinds of clothes. In any case, an attack by a .44 caliber is something I've experienced hundreds of times already during training."

"Training...? More importantly, how did you know it was coming? Your back was turned when the pistol went off."

"In Onii-chan's eyes, I saw the reflection of that girl's gun falling. I saw the muzzle pointed in this direction, and that the hammer would strike the ground. Furthermore, that gun looked very old and very dangerous."

From...from the reflection in my eyes? She saw all that? And in such detail.

This alone was surprising enough, but what really surprised me was something else entirely.

This girl had very clearly-

Just used her own body as a shield-

For me.

Far from trying to take credit for doing as much, she even ignored her own injuries, first worrying on my behalf.

From the depths of her heart, Kaname really wanted to protect me.

An iron resolve which willingly took sacrifice in return for my wellbeing as a more than even trade.

-Deep within my heart, my feelings towards the existence called Kaname grew increasingly more and more muddled.

Kaname.

Just who on Earth are you?

3rd Ammo - Secret of the Deep Blue -Deep Blue-

After I brought my self-proclaimed and publicly recognised sister, Tohyama Kaname back to my dorm –

"…?"

Because Shirayuki has been busy with the Cultural Festival, my room should be in a deep mess… But right now, it seemed to be quite organized and clean.

No, it's overly clean.

Firstly, except for my shoes, there were no other shoes in the shoe cabinet.

Also, the living room and mini-room were also different. Aria's heart-shaped pillow, Shirayuki's clothes cabinet, Riko's games – they were all gone.

But… my stuff still remained.

It feels like I've gone back to the time before Aria moved into my dorm.

"Hey, erm… Kaname, didn't you say just now, something about trespassing in my room…" I asked. While the suspect who was in the washroom replied…

"This place is a Tohyama home, so Tohyama Kaname coming into this place should be no problem. After all, family members can go into family residences anytime they like."

Then, she rinsed her mouth noisily.

Looking closely, the toothbrush cup that Kaname was holding matched my toothbrush cup. Where did she get that? This way, it

already looked like we were siblings with a good relationship.

“Why do I feel like there are many things that have disappeared…”

“I sent all the stuff with their scent to the hospital,” said Kaname with a look of displeasure.

“You did this kind of thing again…”

“The pillow with Aria’s smell, I sent it out after tearing it. Also, I either cut or creased Shirayuki’s black lingerie and Riko’s games before sending them out. It was really tedious.”

“…”

“It should have already reached the hospital, I think? Pink-hair and the others will probably get a huge fright after opening the parcel. Hehe, I feel like jumping for joy just thinking about it.” Kaname said with a dark expression and gloomy smile – an icy chill ran down my spine. How can there be such a sinister girl? This is unmatchable even by the dark side of Shirayuki when bullying Aria.

As an elder, I should warn her, right?

“Kaname, let me tell you.”

“Hm?”

While I scratched my head and put on an angry expression, Kaname seemed to have “Yes, what happened?” written on her face. She seemed to not know about whether she did something wrong.

“Erm… I know you don’t really like Aria and the others, but your approach is too nasty. For example, you took advantage of the fact that nobody was at home and destroyed other people’s things.”

“…Eh, why are you angry?”

“Although there was no other choice, but since you self-proclaim to be one of the Tohyamas, you must not do such despicable things from now on. Got it?” Using a tone that could make people stop retorting…

Kaname looked up at me with an aghast expression, then nodded her head.

'Hm…? How come she nodded at me that easily?'

“I-I know. Then, I will try my best to learn what are “despicable things”, and I will not do these things from this day onwards.”

For some reason, it feels like she is afraid of being hated by me. Even her body was trembling slightly.

“B-but – I also have something to warn Onii-chan!”

After Kaname shook her head like she was trying to revive her emotions, she used her eyes that had a strong will to look at me.

“…What is it?”

“Onii-chan’s taste of women is horrendous! A shorty, one that fakes purity, a fake fairy, a mute girl – I can’t believe Onii-chan keeps those weird and wacky things!”

Looking at her furious expression, I felt like recoiling.

What do you mean by “keep”? Are you treating them like pets? At least they are humans, right?

sigh Given those four derogatory remarks, I could already see who she was refering to, so I’m not one to talk.

“Listen. Onii-chan is the best male in the world, but in this regard, Onii-chan is not conscious enough. You need to change your attitude of “As long it’s a girl, there’s no difference”. Those women are to~tally not worth Onii-chan’s love. That’s. Too. Un. Reason. Able!” Said Kaname, entering her preaching mode as she pointed at me with her index finger. Looks like she is angry at the fact that Aria was residing in my dorm.

Well, I do agree on that part. After all, I do feel helpless at the fact that they live in my dorm.

“ – Even that kind of woman wants to be Onii-chan’s girlfriend, that

is simply inexcusable. Let's say, all the women here are not allowed to do so. So, promise me one thing."

"What is it?"

"Promise me not to touch or even worse, hug any girl other than me."

"What promise, I never ever wanted to touch or hug any girl! Who would do that kind of thing!"

"Then promise me, swear to me, that you will not touch any woman other than me."

"Yes, I swear!"

"If I see any woman trying to stick with my Onii-chan, I will assassinate her!"

"Hey, hey! To start, don't keep talking about killing people. If you want to be by my side, then no matter what happens, don't do anything violent, ok?" I emphasized.

Kaname stared at me…

And nodded earnestly again.

It feels like she really is my sister.

"…"

Just when I was suspecting whether she really understood that and started glaring hard at her –

"…Ah…"

Kaname looked up at my eyes which were staring at her, without blinking her eyes…

…Uwa…

Blushed inexplicably.

“Onii, Onii-chan…”

“What is it now?”

After being asked by me, Kaname was happy and bashful as she revealed a shy smile before bowing her head.

“So, so handsome.”

“What?”

“So hand. That sharp expression just now, made my heart skip a beat. A-and, the thought that we will be living together by ourselves just… just makes me feel like exploding. I don’t know, if it will be possible this time?”

“…?”

“Oh no.”

“What oh no?”

“Really like.”

“Hey, hey…”

“Like. Like. I like you a lot. What do I do?”

Kaname looked downwards. Her face, the back of her neck, and even her head was redder than a beetroot.

Looks like her face is all red, and I’m talking about the intense kind of red.

Although I hope that isn’t true, but according to the atmosphere, the words she uttered just now was definitely 100% sincere.

“I-I think that’s a bit contradicting of you.”

“Why?”

“Although I don’t admit it, but you self-proclaim to be my sister, right?”

“It isn’t self-proclamation, it is true.” Said Kaname, who looked up with her blushing face.

“…Since you say so, then isn’t talking about liking me too strange?”

“Eh? Why?”

“Why are you showing a face of sincere puzzlement? Is there a sister in this world that admits to liking her brother?”

“? ? ?”

Because it seemed that Kaname didn’t understand what I was saying, thus…

“I mean, there would be a problem with blood-related people saying that.”

I had to resort to carefully explaining to her about this general common sense that even made me feel ashamed by just talking about it.

“Blood relations are only a small problem.”

“You mean a huge problem! Go and study about the laws in Japan!”

“That’s my line. Although marriage is forbidden, love is still legitimate!”

Damn… a lawless is actually talking to me about the law.

Just when I had nothing to say after her rebuttal –

“Onii-chan! Like, like, like, I really like! Like, like…”

Taking hold of the opportunity, Kaname leaned on my body while acting like a spoilt kitten.

It feels as if she is in a trance. Am I a silver vine?

“No, don’t cling onto me! Also, more importantly, what is good about me that is worthy of being liked?”

I used a puzzled expression to look at this beautiful yet strange girl.

And all she did was to maintain her terrifying state…

“Yeah, yeah, there are lots of them – For examples, your looks…"

“My looks? I think you better visit the optometrist. In the eyes of most girls, my looks are that of a gloomy person, you know?”

“There’s no such thing, you’re handsome.”

From Kaname’s eyes, I could see that she was serious.

“How can I be handsome. I –”

Kaname interrupted me in mid-sentence and hugged my body tightly. Then, she used her hand to stroke my back gently.

It-it tickles! What kind of trick is this, I am getting goosebumps!

“Oh, and… I also like your gentle personality. Onii-chan is extremely gentle to me, and even bought milk candy for me.”

“Come on, are you a child that has been abducted with candy? That thing is only worth 105 yen.”

“The price doesn’t matter. I still have the candy wrapping. I shall write today’s date on it, then keep it for my lifetime.”

“…”

Just now, my words, “what is good about me that is worthy of being liked”, seemed to have become a landmine –

This ended up in Kaname saying stuff about what she likes about me. Endless praises came out of her mouth, causing me to have goosebumps. She was talking about it to the extent that it looked as if she was worshipping the gods.

Even when I was sick of her praises and went to brew coffee, she tagged along, her mouth full of praises.

It seemed that Kaname’s world was overflowing with love, and no

obstacle could stop her.

This woman really isn't normal in any bit.

She actually turned out to be so fond of me… Looks like I shouldn't advise her to go to the optometrist, but instead the psychiatrist.

Although Kaname promised me to restrain herself from committing violent acts, I just couldn't trust her.

If I were to evict her, there is no guarantee that she will not do anything violent, and she would probably start a comprehensive war with Aria.

So…

It looks like my last resort is to let this strange girl, Kaname stay in my room.

Moreover, Kaname is a subordinate of GIII. To Deen, she can be regarded as a guest.

(Although they gave me a bullshit task of "Romeo"…")

I once heard from Shiranui that a "Romeo" task is different from "Honey Trap" in the way that "Romeo" doesn't start with using the body to lure the other party. Instead, it was to let the other party have a good impression of you.

However, when I look at it, the first step probably has been completed, I'm sure? After all, since the start, Kaname had already had a good impression of me.

But what do I do next… I don't know, neither did I want to know.

Thus, I escaped reality by reading books and watched DVDs. Unconsciously, time flew by and it was already nighttime.

By the way, throughout this whole period of time, Kaname was like a small duck who recognized a wrong mother duck. She kept on following me, even to the extent that she followed me to the washroom.

This also remained the same when I was watching TV on the sofa. As I watched the TV programmes, she sat beside me, grinning.

A normal man would probably be happy if there was such a beauty beside him, right? But now the situation was happening to me. Because she really made me feel uneasy, when it was evening, I warned her sternly to move away.

In the end, she stood behind the kitchen curtain, revealing only half of her body and face. Then, she looked at me for a full two hours.

Because that made me feel peculiar, I said angrily, “Don’t do that either.” –

And she went into the kitchen.

“…”

It felt like if I went to look at her, I would have lost some kind of battle, hence I decided to continue watching TV.

Chk – *Chk* –…

(…?)

There seemed to be a weird noise coming from the kitchen.

Chk – *Chk* – *Chk* –…

After thirty seconds, I finally admitted defeat and turned to look,

“Uh!”

I couldn’t help but to make a sound.

K-Kaname… she was actually sharpening my kitchen knife.

And she was wearing a sailor uniform with a fluttery skirt (she apparently took Riko’s for her own use).

“What…what are you doing?”

“Preparing to cook dishes, Onii-chan.”

– I'm not your onii-chan.

Since things have become like this, it would be foolish to emphasize this fact with her.

Although I think I was losing in patience to her, but never mind.

"This is a good kitchen knife."

Kaname grabbed the knife and showed it to me, smiling.

How do I put it…When Kaname… is holding a sharp object… her expression seems to have a unique sense of terror.

Who knows, she may just like sharp objects like her broadsword. It feels as if she has changed, her eyes were slightly stiff.

"Erm…I heard that that knife was a branded one from Seki, please don't break it. It belongs to Shirayuki."

"I know that, I could determine from the smell. But since it's something useful, I confiscated it. This skirt was also confiscated."

After Kaname used her index finger to twirl the kitchen knife, she inversed her hand, taking the knife and putting in on the chopping block.

"We are a family of two, so let the little sister be responsible for cooking. From today onwards, I will personally make fresh and hot food for Onii-chan to eat."

"What… dishes don't fit with your image, right? Why do you want to do this?"

"I want to replace Hotogi Shirayuki."

"…?"

"Kanzaki Aria, Hotogi Shirayuki and Mine Riko. They obviously aren't our family, yet they reside in this dorm. Which means, those women have good skills, right? So what I want to do is to take up all the responsibilities and acquire their skills so that they will have

no use. Hm, it's very reasonable, right?"

After exposing her devilish smile –

She equipped a pair of crimson-colored sunglasses.

I have seen… that thing before.

That was what she was wearing when she was fighting with Aria and the others.

"What's that? That isn't a weapon, right?"

"The Tella Net Assist System – Um, how should I put it. It is something like a integration of a cell phone, Internet, broadcast and military radio? It is a high-dimensional intelligence interface. Basically, this thing can read my brainwave patterns, then shows the things that are recommended based on the patterns."

"It shows, huh… but… why don't I see it?"

"You can't see it from the front as this monitor is made of an optical multilayer screen. Above, there is a layer of translucent liquid crystal film. Necessary information will be continuously displayed at the top. It feels like the thoughts of the brain are directly connected with the network."

"I have never even heard of such thing. Which company came up with it?"

"It isn't for sale. Because it is still in testing, so it should be expensive. One of this would probably take about twenty to thirty million U.S. dollars. Only the Pentagon and Los Alamos uses it. To me, it is my cell phone."

Twenty to thirty million U.S. dollars…?

One U.S. dollar is about eighty Japanese yen. So that is – a cell phone that costs about 2.2 billion yen!

Just as my eyes were open wide in amazement, Kaname opened a PC Game box that was on the table

…That box, it seems familiar.

Isn't that the game that I bought for Riko as payment for the information about Aria –

The so-called "gal-game" thing? "My Sister is a Goth Lolita"?

"Hey, that thing is…"

"A game. That is also one of the things that I confiscated from Mine Riko. I confiscated it because that fake fairy learnt how to make Onii-chan like her from this game."

Kaname used a device similar to tweezers to grip the disc from the box.

Then, the disc started to rotate.

Looks like she was using the device to read the information in the disc, then used the thing called "Tella Net Assist" to investigate the contents.

"Especially this one, because it's based on the theme of a younger sister's love story. In order to let Onii-chan like me, I will try hard."

"Don't learn that kind of stuff! Moreover, that thing is R-rated – In short, you shouldn't access those stuff at your age."

"Hm, looks like it's better to make simple food."

Kaname turned a deaf ear to me and put the disc and device on the table –

"Also, having the sister cooking dishes is the correct option. According to the contents, the relationship of the brother and sister is supposed to be improved through daily life. And, when making dishes – I must do this?"

As she said that, she crouched slightly, pointing her buttocks at me. From her back, it was possible to catch a glimpse of her apron… Below the ribbon on her back, a pair of white thighs revealed themselves below the skirt.

As Kaname prepared the things she needed for cooking, her skirt would float according to her motion. It was a very tempting sight indeed.

If it was a normal man… he would not help but want to touch it and thus preventing her from making dishes, right? It would definitely be irresistible.

“Before finishing the dishes, the cute little sister needs to do this – exposing her back to the unsuspecting brother. Onii-chan, how does it feel? Are you in the least interested in Kaname’s thighs?”

“No, don’t say those disgusting things.”

“Just as the game starts, there isn’t a problem with touching it, you know? There also an option for “Lifting the skirt up from behind”.”

Kaname turned her head to look at me in such a manner that it looked like she was trying to read my thought.

“Are you an idiot, the only option I will choose is “Ignore”.”

Kaname muttered, “Onii-chan is so unreasonable~”, before opening the refrigerator and looking at the stuff inside –

“Mm, since there are these ingredients in the refrigerator, we’ll make curry.”

She probably used that Tella NA thing to check out what dishes she could make with the ingredients.

Wow, the things used to do with something worth a few hundred million yen are actually gaming and reading recipes.

I'm sure the developer in the Pentagon or elsewhere would cry if he or she heard of this.

"I'm done, Onii-chan!"

I walked into the living room after hearing Kaname's lively call.

She… actually made curry.

Although it smells supposedly nice, I still didn't lower my guard. Only after I swapped our plates did I take my seat.

"How hateful, I obviously won't poison it."

After Kaname smiled bitterly, she sat across me happily.

The curry looked really ordinary, so I tasted a bit…

Of course, it tasted ordinary. Sigh, after all, no matter who cooks curry, it would taste nice.

Looking up, Kaname was eating the curry slowly.

"This kind of thing really makes me happy."

"Is that like, the lines of the game?"

"Course not. The game is only for reference. This is my true feelings. I'm extra happy now."

"What's there to be happy about?"

"This is home, and this is family… something like that. Because this is the first time I've done this."

"Done what? You mean eating at home?"

"Yup. Especially the point that I'm not consuming nutritional supplements, but instead, real food. It's really tasty. Ah, it's a bit weird to praise my own self, hehehe. So, Onii-chan, how does it taste? Is it nice?"

"Yeah, it's nice."

Because this really tasted not bad, I gave her a natural reply.

But as a result, she gave me a shy expression – She looked at me, ate a bit of curry, looked at me again and ate a bit of curry. She repeated this process, looking happily.

A person who can get so happy just by eating curry at home… This is the first time I've ever seen someone like that.

"You do have your own home, right?"

Because I was hoping she would go home ASAP, I asked her that question –

"No, I don't have a home. Even though I have somewhere to live, that isn't really a home." Replied Kaname, whose face expressed a little sadness.

Somehow… it feels like she is running away from home.

"To me, this is my first home. This place belongs to Onii-chan and I – a home of the Tohyamas. Only family members can live here. And talking about family, only Onii-chan and I are included. So, at home, I have Onii-chan exclusively to me. This is the privilege of being a sister!"

"…"

Just because she had been playing house with me for this period of time, Kaname seemed to already be in ecstasy.

But… the incredible thing is…

Perhaps because I had always eaten stuff from convenience stores or luxurious dishes made by Shirayuki, this ordinary dinner at home… seems to give me a good feeling.

It reminds me of how I enjoyed dinner with my family when I was young.

Even the taste seemed to resemble the taste of the food back then. The next morning, I was awakened by Kaname's "Sister Alarm

Clock", in which she used a spoon to hit a pan to wake me up. After that, I ate the toast and fried egg that she prepared for me. This time, I didn't swap our plates.

Looking closer, it seemed that Kaname had woken up really early to finish the housework. The house had become extremely clean, while our clothes were being hung out on the balcony. Her diligence seemed to match that of Shirayuki's.

Then, the two of us took the bus. I was shot curious looks by the Butei High students.

Soon, Kaname alighted at Masters.

Although it's unsafe to let her go off herself… but at least, we had made an agreement.

Also, I am, after all, a Butei. In addition to her agreement, I also prepared some preventive measures. However, it isn't too perfect.

(But will it be that easy for that girl to transfer into this school?)

I thought about this throughout the general subjects…

Because it was lunchtime, I stood up and started walking to the school canteen.

"Well… can you help me call my Onii-chan? My name is Tohyama Kaname."

It was the voice of Kaname, from the rear of the classroom.

"…Ah!"

I turned my head. Indeed, Kaname was standing there, wearing a sailor uniform…

She came… she came to my classroom!

The girls started shouting "So cute!" before touching Kaname's head, while the boys began to stir at the sight of Kaname.

“Hey, hey…! Why are you here?”

I walked towards the rear in panic. Then, the boys followed me. What, what are you doing, guys?

“Seriously! Onii-chan, you forgot to bring your lunch!”

Her tone hardened as she saw me, totally different from what she was when she entered the classroom; gracious and kind-looking. It really looked like she was my little sister.

Then, plop!

She gave me a small basket filled with sandwiches.

Although I took the basket, I didn’t remember anything about preparing a lunch. What is she planning to do?

“She appeared! The rumoured sister!”

“Wow, she really exists!”

“Super cute!”

“I can’t believe it’s Kinji’s sister!”

Of course you won’t believe it, because even I don’t.

“Kinji, to what extent do you have to be a winner in life!”

“He actually has such a beautiful sister!”

“How enviable!”

The boys started to knock my head and kick me.

“Stop, why do I have to get hit!”

Even if there was a beautiful sister, the brother shouldn’t have anything to be happy about!

No, after all, I’m just a novice brother (this is what Kaname claimed, though), so I’m not so sure.

I pushed Muto, who was shouting “Exchange your sister with mine!” away, before pointing my Desert Eagle to ward off the other boys. Then, I pushed Kaname to the corridor.

After that, I endured the pain in my right knee and ran up the stairs, pulling Kaname into a deserted locker room and locked the door.

“…Oh!”

Then I noticed… what Kaname did just now was one of her tricks.

This girl, trying to make sure I admit that she’s my little sister, had “Kinji’s little sister” engraved in the minds of the people.

Just now, she used a trick, acting out a scene of “the daily life of Kinji and Kaname”.

… Unbelievable. She was obviously younger than me, but yet had a really smart brain.

“Hey, Kaname! Don’t come to the second year classroom!”

“Mm, I won’t go anymore.”

Her smiling face proved my theory – she only needed to make sure that people know I have a little sister. That was probably done, I’m sure?

“But… it feels really exciting to meet in the school. Originally, I could have Onii-chan exclusively to me, but now, it seems that I have to be more secretive in school. This feels terrific. I’m sure many girls who have a crush on Onii-chan now feel unwilling, right? Hehe. There’s a feeling of superiority.”

Looking at Kaname talking shyly, with her hands holding her cheeks –

I was just going to lecture her on her actions,

“I heard a lot about Onii-chan, from my friends and senpais.

“What…?”

“Many people said, Onii-chan used to be a powerful Assault Butei. Many Assault Butei have good impressions of Onii-chan. Indeed, Onii-chan is really strong. Although your cold personality hasn’t really changed.”

She actually… went to investigate about such unnecessary matters.

“My past doesn’t have anything to do with you, right?”

“I just wanted to know more about things regarding Onii-chan. Ah, and…”

Kaname revealed a naughty smile.

“During morning break, a boy I didn’t know – brought me to a deserted place.”

“What…?”

“Then, he gave me a letter. I guess it’s a love letter?”

Ooh… it’s that kind of topic.

There’s actually someone that quick?

“…”

Because it was a topic I wasn’t good at, I was silent. Seeing this, Kaname took out an envelope from her skirt pocket.

“Um, what should I do? Can I treat him as a boyfriend for practice?”

As she said that, she took out the letter and gave it to me –

I thought for a while and decided to confirm the contents of the letter.

Where did this idiot come from? He only judged by Kaname’s looks. Does he know how dangerous she is?

Kaname too. She was the one who warned me not to touch other women –

"…?"

When I opened the letter –

"That was a lie, Onii-chan. Are you jealous?"

I actually saw this written neatly on the paper –

Hence, I looked up and prepared to launch a fist at Kaname, but trying to stop me from doing that, she hugged me tightly.

"Kaname… Can you not do this kind of inexplicable pranks?"

"Hehe! This is to confirm Onii-chan's love. Seeing how unhappy Onii-chan was for me, I'm really glad. Onii-chan has started to love me, no, he has already loved me."

Kaname was full of joy as she looked at me, intoxicated with slightly stiff eyes.

"N-no way. It's just that if there's a guy who wants to be close to you, that guy would be in constant danger –"

"Hehe! Don't worry, Onii-chan, there's no need to be jealous. Even if I am really wooed by someone, I will definitely not talk to the other guy. That's because I hate boys. Onii-chan too, I heard that you are one who hates women."

For some reason, Kaname seemed to be happy at the fact that I hated women –

"We really are alike," said Kaname.

"…I guess so."

After all, when we were on the bus the previous day, she seemed to be avoiding the boys.

When I agreed with her on this point –

“After all, we are siblings.”

Kaname gave me a blissful and intoxicated smile –

“Ah, what do I do? I’m too happy. My “like trigger” has been activated. I can’t go back to the classroom.”

“What is a “like trigger”…Don’t be long-winded, just go back to class, even though I don’t know which class you are in.”

“Onii-chan, Onii-chan – Accept my request, hug.”

“Hug?”

“I meant, hug me tightly.”

“Why!”

“Because I want to. So, please, hug me tightly. Tight~ly. That way, I can go back obediently,” said Kaname enthusiastically, with her face on my chest. Her arm was also clutching my back.

If this goes on, even I can’t go back.

If this can make her go back, just hug her.

“…”

To be safe, I made sure that the door was locked and nobody was around, then –

hug

I hugged Kaname, in a style for comforting little children.

“Ah…ah…Onii-chan…Onii, Onii-chan…” Said Kaname, whom was being embraced by me, in a sweet voice.

A teardrop trickled down her cheek and fell to her feet.

She…she actually cried in joy.

How do I put it… she really is a child with an unstable mood.

Perhaps every girl at her age is like her.

“Hey, hey… are you ok?”

Kaname raised her head, revealing an idle expression.

“No-nothing. I can’t take it anymore, can’t, stifle it. I, I can’t stop!”

From her tearful eyes, I could tell that she seemed to be unable to restrain some kind of desire.

She used to have a doll-like look and was polite to the classmates…

But now, she seemed to give out a different atmosphere. Judging from what she said just now, she was probably too excited because of meeting in school, I’m sure?

“Onii-chan, for to-today, I won’t have anymore requests, So –”

Said Kaname, who seemed to be full of pleasure…

She was even panting, giving out a caramel scent.

“Please, please, kiss me – Kissing me is enough –”

Hey, hey…!

What do you think you’re doing!

This is called pushing your luck too far, right?

What a tough girl. Just because I gave way a little, she starts to pressure me.

“Stop bullshitting, I thought we were siblings to you!”

“That’s why. So, it’s possible…Please, Onii-chan, kiss me…”

Kaname was already speechless.

Then, she parted her lips slightly, in a way that resembled sleep… she closed her eyes.

This action… even I knew what it meant.

Kaname was waiting for me. Waiting for me, to… do that.

"…Mm…"

Kaname continued to hold my body tightly.

If this goes on, I can't go back. And this situation would continue.

Should I struggle to get away? No, that won't work. She was better than Aria and the others in fighting, and I wasn't even in Hysteria Mode. I was currently the useless Normal Mode Kinji.

And since just now – Kaname had been making me do things like that, if I reject her, she would feel too shameful, right?

If she becomes violent because of that… I would have no possibility of defeating her.

(What, what should I do…!)

Also – everything that Kaname requests for me to do was everything I considered taboo.

But, to think about why I hated these things… it was because I was avoiding Hysteria Mode.

(… The blood flow…)

Previously, when I hugged her, I had already realized it.

Indeed – even if I got into such a situation, my body still wasn't excited; it was neutral.

Although I don't know why, it was very hard to go into Hysteria Mode because of Kaname.

Who knows, there might even be no chance of going into Hysteria Mode. After all, she is a rather immature girl.

Also, when I was kissed by Kaname in Aria's hospital ward, I was left unscathed.

There's actually someone like that who exists…

This kind of thing… for my future, there shouldn't be a problem with checking this.

… I had no other alternative.

In life, there are times where we have to overcome obstacles – Nii-san told me that once.

Hence, I… whispered into Kaname's ears.

"Ka-Kaname, after I do it, you must be obedient and let me go, ok?"

After I said that, Kaname nodded.

"I…I won't do anymore of such things, are you ok with that?"

Kaname nodded.

"Also, don't tell anyone else, ok?"

nod

She nodded thrice.

Hence, I – with a sacrificing mood – " – Nn –"

I obliged Kaname.

And kissed her.

At that moment, Kaname was – probably too excited as her body was constantly shaking.

From her elastic-feeling lips, warmness went into my mouth.

(…)

But, as I expected… it was the same as last time.

There was totally no strange feeling.

It was like in European or American movies where foreigners gave greeting kisses; there was only a close feeling.

Hysteria Mode didn't occur.

When I was surprised over this matter –

"…Nn! …Nn…!"

A fuzzy sound came from Kaname's throat as her arms moved to the back of my head.

Hey, hey! Don't apply so much force on my head, how long are you intending to kiss me!

I should have agreed on how long the process was.

"Pwah! That's too long!"

Feeling uncomfortable in breathing, I pushed Kaname's head backwards –

Our lips parted as I panted heavily.

In my mouth… there was a sweet taste, similar to caramel. I guess Kaname ate a bit just now?

"… Hah, hah… Terrific, it's terrific… Being kissed by the person you like, it's actually, actually so… hah… Awesome… awesome… awesome…"

Kaname, who was still embracing me tightly, revealed a seemingly painful expression as she panted heavily –

"Hey, hey, Kaname, you can't even speak clearly now, you know? Let me go now."

"Phew, phew, that's, that's true, even, even my heart is going to stop – And, now I know. I can, I definitely can. This is possible, just a bit more, just a bit more and…"

"What are you talking about, hey, calm down."

After I comforted Kaname, Kaname released her arms –

“Thank…thanks… Onii-chan, thanks… thanks for embracing me voluntarily, and kissing me…like this, it really…feels like we’ve become lovers…” She talked about some gibberish things in a soft voice.

Her tears dripped endlessly as if it was unstoppable due to being too touched.

She was so excited that I felt she was going to become dangerous… Hence I really need to make her calm down.

“… Kaname, you obviously are strong, but yet you are such a crybaby. Why are you crying?”

“Because, because Onii-chan, has accepted me, and loved, loved me. So I, I’m now, really blissful…really blissful…blissful… I’m totally filled with bliss…”

I couldn’t stand it anymore, so I used my hand to wipe her tears – But Kaname grabbed my hand with her feverish hand.

“Onii-chan, mine, is only mine, Onii-chan… Thank you, thank you for loving me…From this time onwards, you must continue to love me…”

Speaking these stuff intoxicatedly… her attitude, how do I put it…

Even I, the person who was totally unknown to the thing called love, understood.

This was really – the actions of a girl in love.

And, that kiss just now, had changed the relationship between Kaname and I into “lovers” –

And now, facing the person she was supposed to “date”, she had already started to feel shy.

Looks like the bliss from having her dream come true is already making her so happy that it was impossible for her to extricate

herself.

Sigh, even though this is what Kaname self-proclaimed…

… But, how do I put it? I have an uneasy feeling.

Although it wasn't a battle scene, I still had a bad feeling.

Kaname also stopped her actions –

In the end, since that time till now, I hadn't even seen her appear.

Because Aria and the others were in the hospital, I finally experienced a normal day without hearing a gunshot.

Even so, according to the Butei Charter Article Section 7, "Be ready with pessimism. Act with optimism", I need to think of the worst situation possible and not take the matter lightly.

Hence – I should go and check on the "Preventive Measure".

"Fuuma. Hey, where are you?"

I called the name of the "Preventive Measure" softly, while walking towards a park at the edge of Academy Island. Yesterday, I… ordered my junior – Fuuma Hina to monitor Kaname, who said she was going to transfer into Butei High.

And I also told her to meet at this park…

But as I scanned my surroundings, I couldn't even see a hint where Fuuma was.

It was autumn and dusk had fallen earlier, so my surroundings were dimly lit.

All I could hear was… only the sound of insects.

(Could it be that, because the surveillance had been found out… Fuuma had been attacked by Kaname?)

I looked suspicious as I took my phone to dial for –

(…?)

There seems to be a sounding bell, somewhere in the bamboo forest.

It seems to be Enka. This is… Night Sakura by Sakamoto Fuyumi. Previously, Fuuma and I had went to a Karaoke box for an internship, and she sang this song proudly. Because she sang it so nicely, I still remember it.

When I was heading into the forest –

“Master.”

In the bamboo forest, the bamboo shoot beside my foot talked. In a Fuuma-like voice.

Fumma, you… when were you reborn into a bamboo shoot?

Or is it that you used Tamamo’s shapeshifting trick to become a bamboo shoot? When did you learn it?

“…What are you doing?”

“This is the art of earth camouflage. Because Master told me to be careful not to reveal myself.”

Looks like the truth was much simpler than I thought. She merely dug a hole in the ground and hid in it.

And that bamboo shoot was a tube for breathing.

(There should be a better way to hide…)

I heard that Fuuma was the descendant of a famous ninja, so she came in handy for espionage.

But as everyone could see, her performance in other aspects was not on par with other people, hence she was assessed as a B-ranked Butei.

Although I am obviously worse than her at the point that I have

useless juniors, but for some reason, Fuuma seems to respect me a lot. Hence, as long I tell her “This is a kind of practice”, she will do anything for me, so I guess that’s a virtue.

Also because of this, I treat her as my sister.

Now let’s not talk about how weird “A high school male student talking to a bamboo shoot” is,

“So? What have you found out?”

I asked the bamboo shoot beside my foot.

“Yes. As Master said, she has transferred into this school this morning. Because she is only fourteen, she entered Class 1C as an intern. Thankfully, she is coincidentally in the same class as your disciple Fuuma. As I heard from the Masters, she seems to have come from the US Butei Agency.”

US… Butei Agency…?

Looking at it again, Kaname and GIII seemed to have “US” printed on their protective gear, and Kaname also talked about the Tella NA in US Dollars.

The United States, huh.

Looks like things aren’t what I thought them to be.

“How is she in class?”

“Awe-inspiring style, bright in academics while good in sports, just like a model student. I heard that she had completed Satellite Communications in Massachusetts Institute of Technology at the age of twelve.”

“Really?”

“It seems so.”

Not just in fighting… but good in academics?

It couldn't be seen from her actions at home.

"What about others? Like the evaluation by her classmates, or has she been prone to bullying or hate, that kind of thing?"

"All the students think of her as awesome. She is courteous and thoughtful, hence she is well-liked by all."

Well-liked…?

Kaname… that girl.

She really knows how to behave in public.

"However, she is only close to the girls. She seems to keep a distance from the boys."

"Oh… I thought so. So? What does she usually talk about with the girls?"

"She keeps on praising her onii-chan – which is you, Master. Because she is really good with speech, hence Master now has better evaluation by the people in 1C."

B-better evaluation… please, stop it.

"For example, in last month's survey, fifty percent of the girls know about Master's nickname "Gloomy". Everyone used to think that Master was a beast –"

Hey, Fuuma, do you really respect me?

Can you not do that kind of pointless surveys?

"But now, the girls in 1C are now interested in Master, and even your disciple Fuuma was asked a difficult question, "Is Hina dating Tohyama-senpai". What do you think about that, Master?"

"My thoughts don't matter."

"What do you think about that, Master?"

"Didn't I just say that? My thoughts don't matter. But, about

Kaname –”

I sighed.

“For now… there’s no problem, right? She’s unpredictable.”

Since Kaname showed that kind of attitude… Looks like she isn’t going to harm the other students.

I’m relieved.

Who knows, Kaname might actually have an obedient nature, and she isn’t acting as a good girl.

“Also, she mentioned something about her rules in life, like “No acts of violence towards others” and “No disobeying stronger people because it’s simply unreasonable”.”

This was our promise – and what Kaname once said. This was information that I already knew.

“…Ok, I understand. We shall conclude this investigation, thank you for this.”

“To be able to be at Master’s service, your disciple is honoured.”

After the bamboo shoot finished speaking, I was just about to leave –

“…Master.”

But I was called by the bamboo shoot.

“What do you want?”

“Um… I’m deeply ashamed. Actually, there is a drawback with this camouflage…”

“Drawback?”

“Which is, one cannot climb out”

“…Are you kidding me…”

This fellow really is useless.

Originally, I was going to leave her there, but I still decided to help her.

Then, I grabbed the bamboo pole…

“It’ll be ok once I pull this out, right?”

“Indeed. This way, I will be able to stretch out my hand and climb out.”

“Then I’ll pull it out now?”

“I’ll be grateful.”

After our mini-conversation, I pulled it hard.

But, this really was… buried firmly. It was like a real bamboo shoot.

What the hell? Why do I have to pull out a bamboo shoot in autumn? Moreover, I’m using my bare hands.

Pull…pull…pull…! After I tried to pull hard a few times…

Pop!

I finally pulled out the bamboo shoot. Below, a Fuuma wrapped in a plastic bag was revealed.

The structure was actually that simple!

Ka…sha…ka…sha…

Fuuma, with her back facing me, came out from the plastic bag like a butterfly after metamorphosis; jumping out of the bag… – Bam!

“Uh, ah!”

I was hit by Fuuma’s back and went a few steps backward, towards the direction of the bamboo shoots.

Then, my body pressed against the bamboo, as if using the bamboo as a slingshot –

And then bounced back towards Fuuma.

“Get, get out of the way!”

“–!”

“?”

Sha!

I accidentally pushed Fuuma from her back and fell.

“…!”

“…!”

And the final posture we landed in was –

Fuuma’s limbs were lying on the floor, while my body was lying on hers.

It was probably because of a habit from Assault that I supported Fuuma’s body by hugging her body which was clad in a sailor uniform.

It, it feels like it was I who threw myself on Fuuma…!

And beneath us, there was a sheet of plastic. Coincidentally.

“–You, youyouyouyou! What is this, Master!”

Fuuma, with her limbs on the ground, was extremely surprised.

She turned her head, and saw that my face was just at the back of her neck –

Resulting in her body freezing.

(Oh… Oh no…!)

This is bad…!

Even if it had been an unexpected situation, this accident could still make me guilty of sexual harassment, and I wouldn't be able to deny it.

According to Butei High regulations, Fuuma was my Amica – in other words, something like my disciple.

If something like sexual harassment happened between Amica, the punishment would be much more serious. Because, to the judge, this would be considered as a despicable act of abuse.

I heard that the Masters' corporal punishment was just nothing compared to the punishment for this crime.

The punishment from Butei High Masters was extremely strict, and even people who have seen it will never believe that Japan was a country ruled by law. It could last till about three days and three nights, and one would face such serious violent punishment that one would yell "Just kill me!" almost every half a minute. It was that scary.

Although I'm not sure if it's good or bad, I didn't enter Hysteria Mode, but to prevent myself from facing those charges, I racked my mind for a solution.

How am I going to survive this ordeal…!

"Mas-master… ah…?"

Ah.

This is not good.

Fuuma, she – started to have a shy voice.

"May I ask what, what, what does this mean…? If, if I do this with Master without being married… Your disciple, your disciple will get scolded by her parents!"

This was obviously a representative of Fuuma's doubt…!

My brain…!

(…Quick, think of a solution!)

If I keep silent, this situation will become worse.

Anything is ok, just say something!

“This, this, this is, practice!”

I just had to blurt that out.

“Prac-practice…? Why was that so sudden…!”

“Bu-Butei need to be able to go against any kind of sudden situation!”

I had no other alternative…

Since I had already said it, I had to continue lying.

Although in a sense, it had already become a big wrong.

“What, what, what kind of practice is this! Your dis-disciple has never heard of this move!”

“No, this is, this is a practice to perfect a posture.”

“This, this posture? B-but, this really looks like, that, that, men and women –”

“Don’t be long-winded! At least, this can exercise the muscles. Start to do push-ups and stuff like that.”

“W-w-w-w-we actually have to do those up-and-down moves?”

“Don’t panic! What’s wrong with up-and-down moves! I’m saying, this is, this can make you overcome your weakness of panicking; it’s kind of killing two birds with one stone.”

“Your disciple’s… weakness…!”

“Since long ago, when you were training with me for unarmed

combat, you had always been unfocused. If that happens in real combat, you will have to face defeat. So from today onwards, no matter what I do, don't lose your focus!"

"Your, your disciple has understood."

What? She understood that easily?

I was only making some random excuses… but Fuuma accepted that

so easily.

It's, it's really good, I'm lucky that my "disciple" was an idiot.

"In-indeed – this can make me concentrate better than combat practice. Master is very smart."

"Not bad, huh?"

"Um…so, your, your disciple is going to budge. Master, please be lenient."

Fuuma looked downwards shyly… then according to my instructions, she did random sorts of push-ups. Together with her movements, I followed suit.

However, it seemed that carrying me on her back was too tough,

"…Hmp! Hah! Hoo! Hmp!..."

Fuuma's panting seemed to get a bit hasty. She looked like it was tough.

But, she really is a descendant of a ninja, she could still endure it.

Ah… Anyone who saw a boy and a girl close together secretively at night would definitely misunderstand. So Fuuma was scared of these "up-and-down moves" because of this?

I guess we should change a position.

Hence, I moved my hands to Fuuma's waist and propped my upper body.

When Fuuma saw that I had changed my position,

"…Is, is this, real-really practice? Master?"

She was uncertain of the new position and uttered those words. I could feel a sense of shyness from her words.

I guess so. After all, if I were Fuuma, I would be frightened.

However, I could not do anything else. After all, I needed to make sure Fuuma didn't misunderstand, so that I would not be killed!

"Yes, it really is!"

"I-I understand."

This girl understood again, huh. It's a bit lucky that she has me as her Amica.

From her appearance, it was obvious that she would grow up to become a beauty.

If she had a malicious Amica, who knows what danger she would face. I mean, as long anyone tells her to do something weird and calls it "practice", she would definitely oblige, right?

Well, it is similar to the current situation. Just that I'm not malicious.

(Looks like I really need to help her watch out, so that she would not be scammed…)

Just like this, after five minutes – "Very good! Like that, your concentration and muscular endurance have improved. Practice stops here, you can go back now." I said irresponsibly, sending Fuuma off. Before leaving, she said, "I sincerely thank Master for this practice", making me feel guilty of what I did just now…

(F-finally, I survived this ordeal…)

When I sighed,

…Rustle! Snipsnipsnip… Snap!...

"…?"

There was a noise coming from the forest.

Does that mean… we had been seen…? But, looking from here, the direction of the forest was unclear due to the darkness. So to say, my current location should be unclear as well, right? Don't tell me

there are other couples here?

Just to be safe, I readied my gun and crept towards the direction of the noise…

… Nobody.

“…?”

However, something was strange.

There was some bamboo that had been destroyed.

And… there were traces of gnawing and breaking made by hands. There’s even blood.

The gnawing traces were by a human, and it was by a relatively petite person. It was probably by a female. But what is that person doing? Don’t tell me she’s trying to eat bamboo? It’s not like she’s a panda.

…

There was now completely no noise other than the sounds of insects.

1. ↑ Obake
2. ↑ Aburaage
3. ↑ Tongue-twister because Riko uses a portmanteau of cosplay, "コスプレ" and Rekyu "レキュ", joining on the "レ" kana.
4. ↑ Anti-materiel rifle
5. ↑ Aramid fiber
6. ↑ Kun'yomi

4th Ammo - Three Roads of Immorality -Three Outs-

After school the following day-

Due to Kaname's constant nagging that I go to the movies with her, to the point of even physically pulling me, some mysterious anxiety plaguing her, I was left with no alternative but to follow her to Odaiba.

As we arrived in Odaiba, I made my way to the theater box office to purchase two tickets for an action film, when Kaname unexpectedly produced two previously-purchased tickets for a romance film.

Simply throwing them away would be too much of a waste, so I was forced to escort my self-proclaimed little sister as we sat side-by-side in that dim theater, and watch some sickeningly sweet romance film which I couldn't care less about.

Worse, at each and every plot point which saw the male and female characters stuck together, Kaname would grab my hand.

Even when I rebuffed her efforts, she'd simply reach out once more. I resigned myself to the torturous fate of "holding hands during a movie".

That girl kept rubbing the back of my hand with her fingers. Just what on Earth is she up to?

As the movie finally drew to a close-

"That was so good-!"

"...Well, the story was alright, I guess."

We headed to the McDonald's next door for a cup of coffee and a brief rest.

I was constantly worried that Kaname would, like the other day in the locker room, flip some weird switch and once again enter that mode so much like an animal in heat. In any case, it looks like today things are just fine.

"Especially that sunset scene. I wonder how they shot it?"

"It doesn't look like they used a rail. My guess is they took a helicopter shot at low-altitudes. Those birds seemed to be CG, though."

"Ah? No way!"

"It was a clever use of backlighting for shadows. Still, that scene was pretty skillfully done. By suddenly thrusting a setting unrelated to the story at the viewer, they completely changed the mood. It's a good trick."

"Ohh. That's right, the second I saw that scenery, I definitely felt a lot more relaxed. That natural scenery sure was beautiful."

As I chatted with Kaname, whom it seemed loved movies...

I discovered some of my sentiments were shared by her.

On an impulse, I shifted the topic to action movies. Delighted not one bit less, she continued the discussion.

Even thrillers and comedies, her feelings were exactly the same as mine. How surprising.

...To be honest, for a girl to share my interests like this; this is a first for me.

After all, considering the animal movies Aria likes, Shirayuki's favorite hard-to-understand old man films, or those artistic films requiring a peculiar sense of aesthetics that Riko watches, the girls of Baskerville sure have some strange tastes. Reki, of course, has never watched a movie before.

...But back to the topic at hand...

Back there in the theater, when she held my hand, and waved hers in excitement, I could see the numerous bandages she wore.

When I asked her about them,

"Ah. This is...because yesterday I made a present for Onii-chan, but I used too much strength, and pricked myself."

"A present?"

"That would be this! Here."

Having thus spoken, Kaname...reached into her Butei High designated bulletproof backpack, and pulled out a paper bag with the word "LOVE" written in large red letters.

At first I mistakenly thought that label was printed, but remarkably, it was entirely handwritten.

Just the bag itself was terrifying enough, but that didn't stop Kaname from handing it to me, her expression exclaiming "Open it! Open it!"

Without any other choice, I ripped the heart sticker sealing the bag closed (which the sticker, I should note, also seemed to be handmade), and *kacha kacha* pulled out what was contained within.

"..."

It's a handmade...

Plush...

Me.

It's deformed, sure, but without a doubt, it's me.

Attached to its left breast is a label: "Onii-chan".

"It was my first time doing something like this, so it was hard fought."

Even though Kaname cutely stuck her tongue out...but, but this

thing...is moist with blood.

Signs that it's been vigorously washed were apparent as well, isn't this just like something from the set of a horror movie!?

Even though she mentioned pricking herself, but for there to be this much blood, no matter how I look at it, wasn't she badly hurt before she even started?

"...?"

With great consternation, I removed the "Kinji doll" completely from the bag. That leaves...

Attached to the right hand of the Kinji doll is a "Kaname doll".

The hands of the two dolls are connected by a red string, tying them together, as if to say, "No matter who tries, no matter what happens, nothing will ever separate them". [1]

"Onii-chan, do you like it?"

How on Earth could I like it? This kind of bloodstained doll! Are you trying to pick a fight!?

I was this close to blurting out these three lines...

But Kaname looked at me, eyes pleading "Praise me, praise me", as she laughed brightly.

With the atmosphere the way it is, she might just kill herself if I say something wrong. She seems to hold me on quite the pedestal.

Nevertheless, if I praise her too much, next time it might just be a full-size doll of me. With a full-size doll of her to match, of course.

Accordingly, I responded weakly.

"Um, yeah. Sure."

After answering, I returned the two dolls to their heart-covered bag with trembling hands.

"So anyway. What's the occasion?"

"Celebrating our becoming lovers."

"...Huh?"

"Well, Onii-chan, you've hugged me, kissed me, brought me to your home in secret, talked to me publicly at school; both in public and in private you've showered me with your love. You even promised me you won't meet with any other girls or love any other girls."

"..."

Um, I'm pretty sure what we agreed on was pretty different from what she just said.

"-Onii-chan. Haven't I dutifully kept our promise?"

Right as I was about to throw the dolls away, Kaname painstakingly smiled and asked me this.

"Hmm?"

"I've been keeping our promise. I haven't done anything violent to anyone. That's why Onii-chan also hasn't met with any other girls or embraced any other girls, right?"

Confronted with her candid smile and question- yesterday's incident with Fuuma flashed through my mind.

But in any event, it's not like this happened anywhere near her, so it's not like I have any responsibility to report on it, right?

No matter how you look at it, it was out of my control anyway.

"Right."

Hearing my response,

"Hmm?"

Kaname continued to stare at me, her face not having so much as twitched the entire time.

"You know me, I've been quite friendly with my classmates. Haven't killed a single one. Don't worry, Onii-chan."

"Isn't that obvious?"

Why emphasize that?

"That thing before with Onii-chan, I was happy, you know."

"What thing?"

"When you protected me, back on the bus."

...?

Ohh. She means that time when we returned from the Butei hospital, when everyone crowded around, and I helped hold people back. It's quite surprising she still remembers.

Even describing it as "protecting", how exaggerated.

"That's why, I'll protect Onii-chan too. From shrewish women. If there are ever any sluttish women calling you to strange places to do strange things, make sure to let me know. There's no point in worrying about things alone."

Truth be told, my utmost wish right now is that someone would save me - from you.

"Today I wanted to confirm something."

"Which is?"

"Whether or not Onii-chan truly loves me. But Onii-chan was willing to go on a date with me, so I finally understood. I am loved by Onii-chan. When we were watching the movie, Onii-chan was willing to accept my hand - just like those dolls. I'm so happy. I can't help but want to cry out that if we could go on like this forever, it would be so wonderful. That's how I honestly feel."

"...For...forever..."

"I'll always love Onii-chan, and Onii-chan will also love me. Our mutual love will last for all eternity."

Her subtle gaze seemed to be aimed at the bag with the dolls.

Laughing lightly, she gently stroked her wounded hand.

Several days later, I received a call from Watson informing me that Aria and the others had been released from the hospital.

They were originally a rather rowdy bunch; my guess is, the reason they hadn't left the hospital until now is that "training camp" or whatever of theirs.

Even though Watson had already assisted me in explaining to them that the reason I was caring for Kaname was the strategy decided upon by Deen, but what Kaname had done in front of them was still easily misunderstood.

Under the status quo, if I were to run into Aria and the others in the course of normal school duties...

It'd be bad for my health no matter how I think about it.

Particularly Aria. If I'm not careful, she might just open fire instead of saying hello.

That being the case, I'd better start by humoring the good master.

Giving a call to my master, she responded with a command, "I also have something to say to you, come on over".

When I inquired as to her current whereabouts-

"I'm on top of the SSR building."

She answered thusly.

(Supernatural Searching Research?)

Ugh. I've got a bad feeling about this. Pretty soon, I'm bound to have ulcers.

I arrived at the SSR building I sorely did not want to see, climbed the mystifying stairway that had totem poles for handrails, passed through the magician-painted doors, and exited on the rooftop.

Under the light of the setting sun, I saw Aria, eyes closed, a complicated expression on her face, sitting in the lotus position.

Standing next to her, an SSR third year sempai, Tokitou Juria.

On the fence around us were seated a handful of seagulls.

"..."

Even more foreign looking than the quarter Aria was the half, Tokitou-sempai.

She extended her pale white fingers, resting her hand on Aria's head.

As if able to see me, Sempai turned those pale blue eyes whose pupils could be clearly seen to face me.

"Uh. I'm a second year, Tohyama, a classmate of Kanzaki Aria over there."

"Please, be calm."

Tokitou-sempai coldly responded. She was SSR's chief representative- she'd already received her recommendation to begin study next year in Russia, in the parapsychology program reportedly begun by the Soviets.

The impression she gave was of someone strikingly clever, and her

grades were excellent.

But for various reasons, she had always been estranged from her fellow students.

"Ah! Kinji."

Aria finally noticed my presence and opened her eyes.

Look, you. Would it kill you not to sit in the lotus position with a skirt on?

The scenery underneath that short skirt was thankfully hidden by shadows, but if weren't for that backlighting, I'd have already struck out.

"Pay attention. Focus your mind."

Having been commanded by Sempai in a low voice wholly unsuited for a girl, Aria once again closed her eyes as if meditating.

...It sure is strange. That Aria, listening so obediently?

I stood silently off the side for some time.

I heard some sort of ear-piercing sound, probably from a far off jet or something similar.

"...Kanzaki. What was already bad has become worse. Your frontal lobe center's begun to emit Fmθ (frontal midline theta) brain waves. Just because the boy you like has appeared in front of you is no reason to lose focus."

"Wh, what?"

Her head raised, Aria's canines were bared.

Blushing so red that it could be clearly seen even in the sunset, she blinked in surprise.

She faced me, turned back to face Sempai, and then looked once more at me, her gaping mouth distorted into an amoeba-like shape.

That's an expression Aria only wears when she's literally stunned speechless.

"-Your dream is to be held by that person?"

Hearing Sempai say this-

Kaboom! Aria's blushing face hit an entirely new level.

The way her face turns red is just like Hilda's three-stage transformation.

(Held by...me?)

The hell does that mean?

Well, I've definitely held her in a bridal carry before, even if that was while in Hysteria Mode.

When we spar, I frequently grab a hold of her to practice throws. Not that I've ever succeeded; she's always either counter-thrown me, or bit me, or even poked me in the eyes.

"～!"

Aria *thump! thump! thump!* bounced around while maintaining lotus position, in an attempt to vent her aggression (though seemingly without uttering a word). Tokitou-sempai, in the meantime,

"Even though your outer appearance is decidedly that of a young child, but the things you think about are quite precocious; even I can't help but be embarrassed. Wait until you're a little older to think about those sorts of things. If you do those kinds of things with that delicate body of yours, you might just break,"

Told Aria with a reluctant sigh.

"Wait! No! There's no way I would! Wrong! You're wrong! You're completely mistaken! Absolutely mistaken! That's, that's WRONG!"

Aria finally spoke.

Retreating a step, she waved her arms and stamped her feet like a child throwing a tantrum, denying Tokitou-sempai's assertion in wild abandon.

This was the reason for Tokitou-sempai's social isolation.

From the time she was small, Tokitou-sempai has always had ESP; in her homeland of Russia, she'd previously appeared on TV, her expertise the ability known as scanometry. This was the ability to read brain waves through the medium of touch, and from those, interpret one's thoughts.

If what she saw she perceived as having potentially adverse consequences (even if only slightly so), she'd made it a habit of warning the person in question. Sempai seemed to regard this as a sort of a guiding tenet for her life.

Unfortunately, just like Aria was doing currently-

I'd heard that each and every person who'd been read had taken immediate offense, protesting with great umbrage that they'd never had such thoughts.

Because of this, she'd quickly become a hated individual. Besides SSR, Sempai had no place to call home, truly a solitary and lonely existence.

"-Then, let's call it a day, Kanzaki. Ever since Tohyama arrived, you've been completely distracted, to the point that I can no longer see a thing. Even if I've been able to grasp your alpha waves using your sigma rhythms as a base, there's no way to recover from that minimal mu curve. Simply put, this is otherwise the condition of one who is pre-occupied." [2]

"No! That, that... NO! NO WAY!"

Trying to rise from where she'd been throwing a tantrum, *thud!*

Aria instead tripped, falling over backwards and planting headfirst.

Just what has her so freaked out? To the point of falling over in such terrifying fashion.

It seems even the gulls atop the fence are flabbergasted at Aria's antics.

"Listen up, Kanzaki. The metier you seek isn't something you achieve through sheer force of will. It comes when you truly regard your target as part of your own body, the feeling you're aiming for should be as natural as moving an arm or a leg."

"Like a part of your body, huh. Then what do I do if it *is* a part of my body?"

"That just makes things simpler. The kidoujutsu used by the second-year Hotogi applies similar methods in physical enhancement techniques."

"So um, this body part. What if, for example, it were something like hair?"

"Hair? Hmm. Well, for hair like yours, let me see. Perhaps imagine it as having grown two extra arms, or maybe wings; that sort of image. The greater your ability to picture it in your mind, the better. A more conventional method might be to look at pictures of an angel or Buddha and practice that way."

"I, I see. In that case, I shouldn't have any problems imagining it. I just need to remember either Riko or Hilda, which should be plenty."

"?"

"It's nothing. I was just talking to myself."

"...One other thing. Eat whatever it is you like. Right now, you're like a budding flower; there's no way to tell what exactly it is that will cause that flower to blossom. Anyway, whether it be the first type, or perhaps even a mix of the fourth type ESP, use of one's ability - intentional or otherwise - will take something out of you. Afterwards, you'll notice a craving for those nutrients. So, how is it? Anything you want to eat in particular?"

"Mm. Peach buns."

Hey, look here, you. That's what you want all the time anyway isn't it?

"Peach buns is it? Kanzaki, you must be quite the sugar fiend."

Tokitou-sempai, having so spoken, turned to face the door to the rooftop, in other words, where I was standing.

Her twin, pale-blue eyes, pupils like black spots, zeroed in on me like a pair of leveled guns.

"You. Move. I won't think it rude. Though I will not, or rather, have no desire to, look in on the heart of a man, if I accidentally bump into you, because you haven't created proper distance, and you mistakenly think I tried to look, then I will not be pleased."

Hearing Tokitou-sempai's words, I carefully steered clear of her, and approached Aria.

No matter how precise Tokitou-sempai's powers were...I couldn't help but pity her. With the way things were for her, even daily life must be terribly inconvenient.

Just as Tokitou-sempai exited the roof, leaving me alone-

"Theeeeeeeeere's something I need to say first! Everything Sempai said just now, it's all wrong, alright? There's NO way I would think something so shameful! From the moment I was born, I've never once thought anything like that! It's wrong, WRONG!"

I walked over to Aria's side, who was screaming over and over "Wrong! Wrong!"

From the start, it's not like I was worried about what kinds of things she was thinking.

What's important isn't that.

"-Hey. Aria. What was that just now?"

"Practice for telekinesis, though it's not like it worked."

...As I thought...

Taking advantage of when I wasn't around to do the one thing I most dreaded!

Striking, slashing, shooting; this girl who could just about open a store in offensive techniques was now trying to add psychic powers to her repertoire.

I've counted before, the number of times she's opened fire on me is incontrovertibly more than the enemies we've faced. For her to master another superfluous weapon is of great concern to my continued wellbeing.

Please don't learn something like that. Regrettably, I'm quite clear; even if I tell her this, there's no way she'll just stop.

"Please don't learn something like that."

"Even if you say that, I'm not going to just stop. You should be quite clear on this, no?"

Upon hearing the conversation play out exactly the way I imagined, I couldn't help but be discouraged.

All I can do is to prepare myself. Maybe I ought to go take the picture they'll use in my funeral portrait.

"Why do you want to waste time and energy learning something like that?"

"I'm not telling you."

Tossing her head aside in response, I asked Aria more directly.

"Is this in order to revenge yourself against Kaname?"

"...Kamome?" [3]

Aria, having seemingly misunderstood, turned to look at the seagulls on the fence around us.

"Not kamome, Kaname. In short, GIV."

Hearing my response, Aria sharpened her already jagged gaze, her piercing glare focused on me.

"Oh? You've even helped her choose a Japanese name. How kind. Seems like you like her, that middle-school student, you lolicon!"

Bam! She abruptly stomped on my foot.

"That, THAT HURTS! It's not like I had a choice! She'd already gone around calling herself my sister, even transferring to this school! If I'd let her call herself GIV..."

"-I'll tell you what I told Watson: that tramp ambushed us, put us in the hospital! She's clearly an enemy! AN. ENEMY. And yet, *still* you people...!"

Aria glared at me with her camellia-colored eyes, her personal grudge evident in her gaze.

"Listen to me, Aria. Kaname was sent by GIII as an emissary of sorts. After she attacked you, she laid down her arms- even helped carry you all to the hospital! Right now, they still haven't chosen sides; they belong to neither Grenada nor Deen. If we want to persuade them to join- Ow! OW! That hurts! Stop it, stop hitting me!"

Bam! Bam! Thump! Thump!

"Shut up, shut UP, *SHUT UP*! You traitor!"

I grabbed hold of her head, and held her back; her tiny arms, swinging, hit only air. Like this, by relying on the difference in our arm lengths, I could keep her punches from connecting.

Having sealed her fists with this completely conventional method, pouting, she puffed her cheeks like a blowfish.

"Hmph! Forget it. You clearly just *love* that girl, and Watson and the others are scared witless. Continuing this conversation will just lead us in circles, so I'm not going to bother repeating myself. We'll do what we think is right; who cares what you guys do."

"You only talk, never listen..."

"That's you!"

At this anime-sounding retort from Aria, we traded glares.

"Changing topics, where's that girl staying now?"

"My room. With the way things have developed, I've been left responsible for keeping an eye on her."

"I knew it~"

Aria stuck out her lower lip, mood bad to the extreme.

"GIV...Kaname, you called her? Kan-a-me-chan~ As long as that suuuuper cute little sister of yours is to be found at your place, you can be sure I won't! There's not a chance in Hell that I'll share a room with an enemy!"

"Do you have to be so cutting? It's not like that was your place to begin with, anyway. It's not like I feel all that safe having to live together with her either, you know? It's to the point where I've considered asking one of you girls to be a bodyguard-"

Before I could finish what I was saying, all of a sudden one of the seagulls *flap flap* took flight.

These gulls from the Tokyo Bay are larger than normal, and subsequently, the sounds made as they flap their wings is also louder than normal. Both Aria and I reflexively turned to look.

It was almost as if it had sensed something bad was about to occur, and consequently, had beat a hasty retreat.

Don't tell me...the weather's going to take a turn for the worse?

"Kinji!"

Aria grabbed hold of my ear, and pulled my head back around to face her.

"You, you...don't tell me you did some, something weird to that girl?"

Flushed red, Aria bared her canines.

"Wha...huh?"

"If you've really done something, forget opening holes- be careful that the British Air Force doesn't blow the entire male dorms to smithereens!"

"Are you trying to start a war?! Listen, Aria-"

"Bu, bu, BUT, didn't you guys ki, ki, kiss!? You lech! You're seriously something; at that level, forget shameful, it's almost admirable! This damn womanizer!"

This time Aria used her legs to engage in a lower, middle, and upper attack combo.

Ouch, it really friggin' hurts!

This girl, because her hands have been rendered useless, has begun to kick without mercy.

"Like I had anything to do with that! She's the one who kissed me; you were there!"

"Even Riko couldn't help but exclaim 'To touch even his little sister, Kii-kun is seriously a human ditching humanity'!"

What do you mean "a human ditching humanity"?

Riko's words sure are hard to understand. [4]

"What do you have to say for yourself!? You've, you've even kissed me! And Shirayuki, Riko, even Reki! Honestly! This kissing bandit! Don't tell me you've kissed your sister again since then!?"

"Bam!" "Bam!" Aria began to stamp on the floor with great strength, intimidating me. I-

"Well, that's..."

This is bad. After that, it's true that we kissed.

But that was because I'd been grabbed so tightly by Kaname that I couldn't move, couldn't escape what came next.

It's not like I'd had any impure feelings about it either.

That said, it's not like I was completely blameless...but still, there should be room to defend myself.

In order to avoid having to deal with a roundhouse kick from Aria, or having her "open" holes in me, I'd better explain.

"Listen. If we're talking about whether or not it happened, well, it happened. But still! You, who grew up in England, should understand, that was just-"

"You...YOU! Come on here! You guys have only known each other for one week...just how far have things gotten between you!?"

"Let me speak! Stop always interrupting!"

"And...and with your own sister!"

Aria stabbed a finger in my direction, her posture loosening. I shouted in response,

"Listen to me! Kaname, she was never my sister to begin with! You're not the only one who's being driven half-mad by that self-proclaimed little sister!"

Right as I said that,

-Boom!

From near the large radiator installed on the rooftop, a burst of noise erupted.

-Pasha!

This time, the remaining seagulls all took flight in a hurry.

"-Iyaa!"

Causing Aria to scream as she jumped at me.

With her barreling into me, I fell backwards, crashing into the rooftop fence.

(...What was that sound just now...?)

I looked in the direction the sound had originated form.

There didn't seem to be anything strange about that old-fashioned radiator though; even after several moments had passed, nothing changed.

I guess something inside it must have broken down?

"Hey, Aria. Let go of me already."

With Aria in front of me, and the fence behind, I couldn't budge an inch.

But still she buried her head in my chest, refusing to release her grip.

This situation reminded me of the one with Kaname, except that Aria was holding on much more tightly.

"...wrong..."

Aria seemed to be muttering to herself as she whispered,

"...I'm the one who's wrong. Kinji sent me that ring on my birthday, clearly showing how he feels...but I didn't know how to respond...I'm the one at fault here..."

"Aria?"

Because she kept mumbling to herself, I lowered my head and sneaked a peek at her face.

Her face seemed to undergone a transformation, and she raised her head to answer my questioning gaze.

Her face showed her steely resolve.

Stifling her anger, she looked at me with uncertainty in her eyes.

"...That girl...really isn't your sister?"

"Why are you so suspicious of that?"

At my less-than-joyful rejoinder, she again spoke,

"Kinji, do you remember...Do you remember the fight with Jeanne, in that underground warehouse?"

"...?"

"At that time...you told me, 'As long as I live, I will trust you.'"

"Oh...yeah...I remember."

Even though I said it under the influence of Hysteria Mode, but still, it's embarrassing enough to want to die.

"Wait a moment. Why would you bring that up all of a sudden?"

"Because what I have no evidence to support what I'm about to say; it's purely my intuition."

"Intuition...?"

"I feel that...between Kinji and that girl...exists some kind of unbreakable bond. This feeling is the same as the one I felt back then from Kana. Even though I'm still not sure I'm entirely convinced about the thing with that beautiful sempai, that is, your brother?, but to be honest, according to my intuition, it feels right. And right now, what I feel is similar, if you ask me. That is to say, that girl, GIV, or Kaname, whatever...I think she might really be your sister."

Even though I wanted to reject her words with a laugh...

But...I couldn't.

Even though the impression given by the textbooks in Inquesta

classes is so far apart as to sometimes forget who she really is-

The Kanzaki H. Aria standing in front of me at this moment is without a doubt the flesh and blood of the one-and-only Sherlock Holmes.

When it came to the Sherlock who I'd battled on the IU, it was assuredly his nearly supernatural deductive ability that had brought him reputation and fame, but in all honesty, his intuitive prowess was no less impressive.

From that point on, I've been more than clear on one thing.

Aria has, without a doubt, inherited that intuition of his.

And that Aria has just told me...that Kaname might really be my sister.

"With that said, however, the relationship between you and Kana seems different from that of you and Kaname. I'm not quite sure how to explain this clearly, but...if I was to make an analogy, if I were to draw the relationship between you and Kana, you two would be one large and one small version of the same shape, similar, but not identical." [5]

Mm...I think I more or less understand.

After all, my brother really embodies the idealized form of my abilities.

"When it comes to you and Kaname, on the other hand; you two feel like two comma shapes, like Yin and Yang, only showing their true shape when placed together. That's how it seems to me."

Two shapes, incomplete on their own, which only achieve their true form when combined together.

I guess that's how she sees the relationship between Kaname and I?

It definitely isn't the clearest explanation, but still, what she said...

Truly has no basis, and yet carries quite the persuasive power.

I consequently entered a deep state of contemplation, pondering her words, until Aria grabbed me by my lapels.

"...Do you like her?"

"Don't waste my time with that crap. How could that even be possible?"

"Then..."

"...?"

"Then...let's just stay like this for a moment."

Aria held me, once more lowering her head and burying her forehead in my chest.

The atmosphere made it hard to refuse, so I looked to the heavens, trying my best to avoid the fragrantly sweet smell of cape jasmine which wafted over from her body.

The seagulls rode the air currents in the evening sky as they spiraled higher and higher.

"I...think I need to be a little bit clearer too."

"...Clearer?"

Having heard only bits of her mumbling, I asked for clarification.

"Lo, lo, lower your head! Un, un, until I can reach it with my face!"

She uttered forth the strangest command.

"Why? I don't want to. Your head..."

Almost blurting out, "Has an aroma that'll land me in Hysteria Mode if I'm careless", I swallowed my words and raised my head even higher.

"Er, that is, it doesn't matter who, no one wants their face stuck to someone else's head, right?"

"...Stop whining! Look down, down!"

Though her tone sounded almost like that of a drill sergeant calling, "Right, FACE!", by now, my pride was on the line. I stubbornly kept my head held high.

"..."

"..."

The silence continued unabated for a short time, before...

"Then...Kin, Kinji."

When Aria called out, her voice shaking, I lowered my gaze, but only my eyes.

Unexpectedly, her whole body was trembling.

What's going on here? Even though her head's lowered enough that I can't see clearly, she seems to be blushing. From her neck to the tips of her ears, she's thoroughly red.

"Um, then, then...Your, your..."

"...?"

"Your shoelace is undone?"

Reacting to Aria's strange question, as if stiffly read from a script, I couldn't help but look down in response.

At that precise instant, Aria closed her eyes, straightened her back, and stepped forward.

"...!"

"...!"

That blushing face, that tiny mouth...pressed down on my lips.

Without warning, Aria seemed to have become intensely feverish, the boiling heat of her body passing through her lips to me...This

is...

(A kiss...)

I was kissed...?

My brain only just made the connection.

By the time I came to this realization, Aria had already flipped around with her back to me, pigtails drifting along.

And swiftly bolted for the rooftop door like racing the 100 meter.

"ARIA!"

Just what is this supposed to mean?

I prepared to follow after her, but she dashed through the door like a bullet, hands clutched to her chest, as she disappeared down the other edge of the stairwell.

I didn't have the slightest hope of catching her at that speed. In any case, because of the injury to my right knee, it's not like I could run anyway.

"..."

I held my hand to my lips, confirming the beating of my heart.

Aria hadn't opened her eyes to confirm the location of my mouth, instead her clumsy kiss had seen our faces crash one against another, our teeth clacking as they collided...man, it friggin' hurts.

Even though the pain had slowed the feeling for a moment...

Here it comes.

That familiar flow of blood.

- Hysteria Mode -

As expected, if it's Aria, it'll appear. Quite easily too, and intensely.

My mind turned crystal-clear, my entire brain seemed to awake, and quite discernibly, I felt my senses sharpen.

Moreover, something like a sixth sense made itself known...and reported.

- An ominous feeling.

Back then, that sound that scared away all the seagulls...I had better double check what caused it. Was it really just a simple accident?

As I deliberated on the matter, I unconsciously drew my weapon.

I kept an eye out for anything suspicious as I circled around to the other side of the air conditioner.

"..."

But forget a person, not so much as a kitten appeared.

That said, there *was* one thing that stuck out as being rather odd.

Though the neat design of the manufactured fence ought to be laid out in a regular rhombus pattern, in this case, irregularities appeared all over.

Large rhombuses, small rhombuses, even triangles...

It looked as if some unknown person had distorted the shape of the fence time and time again with their bare hands.

Although this irregularity was clearly the work of a person, neither hide nor hair could be found of this mysterious stranger.

It's not like pranks like these were all that uncommon; I, myself, had done similar things when younger...but still, the sheer number of distortions was definitely out of the ordinary.

Approximately 50 different places had been twisted beyond repair...it was no ordinary mind that was responsible for this.

"..."

My Hysteria Mode-enhanced perception also noted something else as out-of-the-ordinary.

Here where I stood, below my feet, beneath my shadow, something was strange.

I knelt down on a single knee, and touched the cement floor.

The floor was clearly irregular...strike that; rather, the floor itself was, for the most part, as expected, had clearly been left scored in

places.

Though my immediate thought was that some sort of tool had left these scars, I don't think that's the case.

My fear is that this...was the work of a person; the scars carved into the cement floor by their nails with horrifying strength.

Seeing the slivers lying atop the floor, I guessed this to have occurred quite recently.

It probably happened sometime between when Aria and I kissed and when she had left- repeatedly and endlessly gripping - and scoring - the cement with their hands.

(Wait...is this writing? Letters, it looks like.)

"T...r...a...i..."

With my shadow in the way, the letters were hard to make out. I moved a little, allowing the setting sun to shine blood-red on the ground, illuminating the words before me.

The words scrawled into the ground weren't just on the ground...they were etched into the wall as well.

"Traitor" "Traitor" "Traitor" "Traitor" "Traitor"[6]

(What the hell is this?)

My blood ran cold. Who? Who could be responsible for such a thing, so much like a dark ritual to invoke a curse?

Well, then again...

This was, after all, the SSR building, a veritable Pandora's Box of strange types from whom such behavior would come as no great surprise.

Likely a result of that scene, straight out of a horror movie, the effects of my Hysteria Mode dissipated faster than normal.

Returning to the dorms, I found Kaname watching a satellite broadcast of a baseball match.

The announcer spoke in English, so it seemed she was watching an MLB playoff game?

"Ugh...two outs. How unreasonable, almost like gutting someone with a kitchen knife."

In response to her whispered, incomprehensible comments,

"Hey, I'm home."

As I greeted her,

Kaname's entire face seemed to smile as she turned to face me.

"Ah, Onii-chan. Welcome back. Dinner's already ready."

Looking more closely, the glass tabletop was littered with caramel candy wrappers.

Of the same kind as those I had previously bought for her at the convenience store.

She seemed to have gone on some sort of binge...was the game really that boring?

"Oi, Kaname. We still haven't had dinner yet, don't fill up on that sort of thing."

"Eh? Why?"

"What do you mean 'why'? Because it's bad for you. And to eat so many!"

I spoke as I took off my coat, and turned to look at her-

Only to find her, once again, with tears filling her eyes.

"Wha, what is it this time?"

"I'm so happy. Love can truly be found here. This just goes to show, I really am the best; after all, I *am* the youngest. Onii-chan's love for me is definitely deeper than it is for anyone else."

Kaname not only seemed to be speaking to herself, but seemed even to have drawn some inane conclusion on her own.

"You, just how in the world did you come to 'that' conclusion?"

"Because Onii-chan is worried about my health."

Kaname, having made a mountain of this minuscule molehill,

Began to rub her fingers against the back of the sofa.

Her fingers were now completely covered in Band-Aids; this time, her entire fingertips having been injured.

"Hey, what's up with your fingers?"

"Oh, um, this is, well..."

Diverting her gaze from me slightly, she replied,

"When...when I was cooking, I was a little careless."

"Can you really hurt yourself that badly just cooking? Are you alright?"

"Nn. Don't worry. Ehehe, I'm fine, I'm fine."

Kaname showed a bashful expression, waving her hands in embarrassment.

Honestly, I can't decide if she's amazing or just clumsy.

Afterwards...

Immediately upon returning home, the scent had given away that tonight's dinner was again curry.

Every two or three days, Kaname would again make curry.

"Do you really like curry that much?"

I asked, as we ate together.

"I don't *dislike* it."

"Only that much? Then why cook it every couple days? Not to mention, each time the taste is the same."

"Mm. That's because the first time I made it Onii-chan said it was delicious."

"Just, just because of that? I'm amazed you even remember."

"As long as it's Onii-chan, whatever you say, whatever you do; I remember everything."

Kaname looked down at the plate of curry with a wistful expression.

"When you told me that, I was so happy...so every time since I've used the same ingredients and the same sauce, in order to reproduce that same flavor, without differing by so much as a gram."

She nonchalantly said something pretty outrageous.

"Not even a gram different? Surely you're not serious?"

"I'm the kind of person who never forgets anything."

She lowered her head, her eyes peeking through her bangs as she watched my eyes.

That gaze...seen through the shadow of her hair seemed almost a glare. Why glare at me?

Then again, she is quite the moody child. It's pointless trying to interpret her every action.

I replied with a simple "Oh, is that so," before continuing to eat my decidedly delicious curry once more.

When it came to normal subjects, the level of instruction at Butei High was rather low by comparison.

It's possible it was because, as rumored, "that kind" of mind was predominant among Butei High students. However, the more likely explanation was simply that, as compared to the "well-rounded" nature preferred among normal students, "excellence in a specific expertise" gave a Butei High student the better chance of becoming a truly top-quality Butei. As a result, placing emphasis where emphasis was due had naturally given rise to the current way of things.

This being the case, one who was immersed in the Butei High curriculum for the entirety of their three years became quite the abnormal person, making such training a one-way trip. As an example, take Aria or Reki. While both are top-rated Buteis, put either of them to work in a normal company as OLs [7], and they'd surely make a mess of things.

Thus, it was for the sake of growing up as a normal adult that I so desperately wanted to switch schools.

(For the time being, let's put everything else aside, and at least work hard at these normal classes.)

Just as I'd finally motivated myself to take this English class seriously...

-Don! ~roll~ ~roll~

Almost as if intended to disturb my concentration, something flew from behind me and rolled onto my desk.

"?"

I picked up what looked to be a wad of paper.

It looked to have been treated with an alkaline solution, a technique

Butei often used to pass confidential information to one another.

I carefully straightened out the paper.

"Discovered 3's true identity. Come to the art equipment room at 1700 hours for debriefing.

P.S. At the same time, how about some rehabilitation?

L. Watson"

Having read the contents of the paper, I turned to Watson, who frowned in disgust, her face appearing to protest, "Moron! Look forward!"

When Watson had lobbed the paper my way, Aria had been blowing her nose, while Riko was fast asleep...It seemed neither of them had noticed our interaction.

But seriously, Watson. Did you really need to communicate with this thing? Couldn't you have just sent me a text, like a normal person?

As I entered the dimly-lit art equipment room, with its curtains drawn, I complained to Watson as I had planned, to which she responded that I'd promised to ignore all texts from her.

She seemed a bit disagreeable.

I could tell from the way she struck my foot with a paper bag enclosing a female school uniform.

This bastard. While in public, she puts up the facade of a dignified honor student, but the second we're alone, she's like a mischievous brat. What was with that just now?

I've always felt like her interactions with me were rather perfunctory, almost like putting on a show. Damn her, looking down on people like that.

"As long as the contents include the words 'rehabilitation', you always pretend you haven't seen a thing."

Watson's cheeks flushed slightly in anger. Well, it's not like there isn't something to what she said...

Watson had relentlessly sent me invitations for rehabilitation, and I had just as consistently completely ignored them.

The so-called "rehabilitation" referred to her dressing up once more as a girl. Watson, who had entered Butei High as a cross-dressing student, was training in preparation for confessing her true gender and her inevitable return to society. According to Watson, this was also to serve as training for me, who she described as having insufficient understanding of the opposite gender, giving me the opportunity to increase my familiarity with those of the feminine persuasion.

And what exactly did that entail?

The two of us locked in a room, as Watson would simultaneously conduct her training to become more feminine while I sought to "become more manly".

Simply put, it saw the two of us engaging in a low-level roleplay; in other words, we played house. Even though we're clearly second years in high school already.

The important point, if you ask me, was-

There was no way I wanted to be caught alone with a girl (Watson) in a small, dark room like this one.

Hence my desperate attempts to avoid her messages at all costs. Can't you take a hint, Watson?

What made things worse was the nigh-obsessed attitude she seemed to take towards these things. Ever since she'd realized that I'd been ignoring her messages, she'd tried every method imaginable to stubbornly force me to come. Take this time, for example, where she'd intentionally paired up her invitation with a matter of actual importance.

In just such a manner, I'd found myself coerced into attending some five, six "rehabilitation" sessions.

"I know you can't wait to get started with the rehabilitation, but first, fill me in. The '3' written on that paper just now- that was referring to GIII, yes?"

"Indeed. You're going to join me for rehabilitation in just a sec, right? I've been waiting for this for so long."

Having reminded me again of the fate that awaited me, she reached her hand into her backpack and pulled out a single page of A4 paper.

"Though I'm still unclear regarding the one who lives with you, GIV, that is, Kaname, but I believe I've been able to ascertain the true identity of GIII."

"You found out from contacts in Informa?"

"No. The name seemed familiar to me, so I visited the Liberty Mason Grand Lodge in London. As I was looking through the American group's 'Non-friendly party list', in the section for 'Agents having received, but rejected, an invitation from Liberty Mason' I found GIII's name. He seems to be quite the big-shot in American Butei circles. Furthermore, his detailed information was all classified at the 'Secret B' level."

"A big-shot?"

"Yeah, famous to the point that we pulled his data pretty much instantaneously. Here's part of what we found."

Watson pulled out a photo.

I saw a man who looked just like GIII.

Although he wore a black suit and black sunglasses, it was, without a doubt, GIII.

"Huh...hey, wait, this...It can't be...?"

What had astounded me wasn't GIII, though.

Rather it was the man next to him, about to enter a black Rolls-

Royce.

This person...was the 44th President of the United States of America...Barack Obama.

From where GIII stood relative to the President in the picture, he seemed to be employed in an escort or bodyguard capacity.

"This is the real thing. He's originally an American Butei, but more than that, he's not just an S-rank either, but a rank higher- an R-rank."

"R-rank...?"

"You haven't heard of it? Among the Butei in Japan exists another R-rank, so I figured you'd heard of it. This rank really exists, and there are only seven Butei in the entire world who have been bestowed with this rating. Since they nearly all serve heads of state or royalty exclusively, they've taken the first letter of the word 'Royal' to serve as their rank name, hence 'R-rank'."

An existence superior even to S-ranks...R-ranked Buteis.

Further, there are only seven of them in the whole world...just how crazy are these guys?

Even if we look at S-ranked Buteis, there are only 712 of them in the entire world.

"An S-ranked Butei can singlehandedly deal with a company of soldiers. An R-rank, on the other hand, can fight an entire *battalion*. If it's small enough, then just one of these individuals could suppress an entire country."[8]

"My God. Next time, pass on sharing all the gory details, please. I more or less understand what kind of nightmarish existence GIII is now. This is ridiculous...how can someone like that even exist?"

Seeing me grow weak at the knees, Watson continued to flip through the information recorded in English.

"Even though the data is still somewhat unclear, GIII's genius seems

to be man-made, that is to say, his abilities appear to be artificially enhanced."

"Man-made...genius...? What the hell are you talking about?"

-Wait, hadn't I heard this before?

Watson seemed to have more or less figured out what was on my mind, so she nodded.

"IU- after the second World War, the submarine IU definitely disappeared, but the plans for its creation were handed over to the United Nations by the Germans. Ever since then, the Americans have been plumbing its depths for research. Their results came in the form of the 'Los Alamos Elite', a plan to artificially create superhumans with science."[9]

They seem to have inherited the IU philosophy.

Although, as compared to the superstitious IU, they seemed to have tackled the problem with a scientific approach.

"The thing is, successful results of the Los Alamos Elite program are quite few. Or rather, zero."

"Zero? Is GIII not a success?"

"Well, at first he was most definitely considered a success. Even at an institution like Los Alamos, his rate of learning was such that it was only a matter of time before the positions of teacher and student between him and the staff had swapped. When it comes to athletic ability, though unofficial, I've heard he's broken countless Olympic records. The clincher is- he did all this while only a teenager."

"Then isn't that a huge success? He even became the personal bodyguard for the President, an elite among elites."

"Up to here, yes. Unfortunately, at some point afterwards, things changed."

"...Things changed?"

"The notes say he went mad. When he escaped from the laboratory where he was raised, with his bare hands, he crippled every member of the entire unit stationed there."

An entire unit...with his bare hands...?

Just how strong is this guy?

And he's insane, to boot. This is no joke.

"Afterwards, the American government sanctioned a hit on him, and they didn't just send one assassin. But even though these were the best, the vast majority of them couldn't catch so much as his scent. Those that did manage to find him never returned."

"...They were killed?"

"No. They became his subordinates. GIII has a real aura of leadership about him, a real charisma. Some minor differences aside, it's just like you."

"Please don't talk about us like we're the same. I'm nothing like that."

Tsuzuri-sensei had said the same thing before. For whatever reason, people seem to occasionally make this mistake. It's not like I even have that many friends, after all.

"-The driver who brought us back from the Shinagawa geofront is another individual who was turned by GIII. With the way things were, it was like sending assassins after GIII only served to increase the size of his group. The American government came to this realization, and called off the hit. They've since switched to negotiations instead, which are yet ongoing."

A "man-made genius" that even the American government can't handle...

A monster like that, there's no way he would ever lose to a group with mediocre grades like ours.

It looks like Tamamo and the others were right...crossing swords

with someone like that is definitely not a good idea.

Having finally understood what we were up against, I was at last able to accept this point.

"GIV, Kaname, appears to have been another artificial superhuman who fled with GIII as he escaped the lab. It's just that since she escaped without ever having entered society as he had, there don't seem to be any records of her existence."

Oi. It's not like I hadn't figured out that much on my own. I mean, look at their names!

"...Why would guys like that want to take part in this 'Far East Warfare'?"

"That I'm still unclear on. We're looking into it."

"..."

"Ok, now the debriefing is over. Let's get started on the rehabilitation."

"..."

"We're starting the re~ha~bi~li~ta~tion, yes?"

Watson showed an expression like that of a small dog whose master had refused to play ball.

"Ah, right."

I, who had gotten lost in a train of thought, quickly raised my head.

Whatever...she'd done her part, so I might as well obediently play along.

I can keep her company for today, I guess.

"Ahem. The setting for today's 'play' is this: I'm a female club manager, and you're a member of the selfsame club. The scenario as well as the script are recorded in the notebook."

"Aren't you going way overboard with this? And please, for the love of God, say the full name - 'role play'; 'play' sounds weird."[10]

My protest seemed to go in one ear and out the other.

"What kind of club should it be Tohyama? How does an old-fashioned equestrian club sound?"

"How is that old-fashioned? Anyway, who cares what kind it is, just hurry up and begin."

"Ok. Then, Tohyama, go and face the door. I'm going to change."

Shortly after speaking, Watson reached into her paper bag and pulled out a school uniform. From behind me...

~rustle~ ~rustle~

...came the sounds of Watson taking off her clothes.

Because she'd violently compelled me to watch before, I knew that beneath her male clothing, only her bottom half was covered by female underwear.

That means that, right now, that..."that" is completely exposed?

So fair it seemed to glow in the light of the setting sun, *that*...

(This, this is bad!)

Strange memories threatened to bubble forth from deep within my memory.

If I was to enter the so-called "Recall Hysteria", that is to say, if I was to enter Hysteria Mode all on my own at these memories, then I'd have played quite the fool.

I need to think of something else, distract myself.

Even if this is completely stupid, let's look for stains on the door or through the keyhole.

Doing so, I noticed something strange about this terribly ordinary

door.

(...Hmm?)

Some sort of light seemed to come in through the keyhole, and looked almost to waver...

Moreover-

I could have sworn I heard someone gritting their teeth in anger on the other side of the door.

(Don't tell me there's someone on the other side...?)

I knelt down, and peeked through the keyhole into the hallway.

Though the hole was, of course, quite small, and thus I couldn't get a clear picture of the whole hallway...

But I at least could see what was immediately in front of me, and there didn't appear to be anyone in front of the door. That sound must have been made by someone passing by.

Be that as it may, what I had heard was no illusion. Maybe it was best to end this rehabilitation session as soon as possible?

"Are you done changing?"

I inquired of Watson.

"Not, not yet. When I was putting on my neckerchief, the hook for my bra came loose. This is such bad luck."

Is the play-by-play really necessary!?

"...Ok, I'm good. Man, when you wear a skirt, the wind keeps blowing in. This just feels so weird."

Finally hearing the words I'd been waiting for, I turned my head - as if playing Red Light, Green Light - to see Watson, dressed up like a girl in her sailor uniform.

Although, to be accurate, she was a girl to begin with, so the *real*

"dress-up" is when she pretends to be a guy normally. Sadly, the opposite impression seems well engraved into my mind.

(On another note...when I look carefully...she really is a girl, isn't she?)

The slender lines of her legs give off a healthy feeling; for them to always be hidden by pants really is a shame.

"...What do you think you're staring at, Tohyama? Oh wait! No, never mind, it's ok! Look to your heart's content. I am, after all, a girl. There's no way I can allow something this small to throw me off. I know even if you normally don't show it, deep down, you're still fond of me."

"What the hell?"

"That's how the script goes."

Watson answered me as she stabbed the notebook with her finger.

"What do you mean 'that's how it goes'? You're the one who wrote this! Why would you write something like that?"

"What, what's wrong with that? What I write is my decision!"

Having thus responded, Watson's legs shifted into what appeared to be a boxing stance.

If she were to hit me, I don't know that I could let it go, although, in this situation, it was probably best to just lower my head and go along with the flow.

"...And then? What's the plan for today?"

"Well, let's start just like we've done before, with small steps."

The term "small steps" referred to a technique from psychology designed for overcoming one's phobias. It involved increasing exposure to one's fear step by step, little by little.

In Watson's case, she'd set as her goal the ability to have others see

her as a girl without feeling nervous or anxious.

The first step was for us to converse normally from within a distance of a meter, afterwards narrowing the distance to 75cm, 50cm, 30cm, and so forth.

"Our previous record saw our shoes separated by five centimeters. Today, I'd like to close that gap entirely. If we can achieve that, then that'd be extraordinary."

And just what part of that is extraordinary?

You know, forget it, whatever makes her happy. Whatever it takes to end this even a second earlier.

"Alright, then come on over."

"Nn. Don't run, ok? Er, wait, that's not it- Then, please just stay where you are, Tohyama...kun."

Just one sentence spoken like a girl was enough to make her blush...

Saying that, she proceeded to walk towards me as if amidst a minefield, careful step following careful step.

Her pink skirt lightly swayed...

Upon closer inspection, she seemed to have even swapped out her shoes for the brown ones designated for female students.

"...Here, here I come, Tohyama-kun."

I waited quietly as she slowly closed the gap between us, stopping just in front of me.

And then, as if steeling her resolve, she took one final step forward.

Finally, her shoes made contact with mines, or rather, could even be said to be slightly atop of mine.

"..."

"..."

Watson was shorter than me, so her head only came up to my chin. Together with the slight warmth of body heat, a slight fragrance of cinnamon floated gently from her short hair.

(...)

This is what makes Watson dangerous.

Because she normally feels like a guy, the second she displays her feminine side like this...

The feeling of disparity makes you particularly aware of how cute she is.

As an example, take Riko in comparison. Because Riko is the kind of girl who gives off a heightened sense of femininity, the second she appears before me, I'm on guard. Having thus prepared myself, even when she closes in on me, I'm able to handle it. In this way, my body will naturally protect itself in a way that makes it non-trivial to fall into Hysteria Mode. Although, I have to say, this approach *is* pretty sad.

When it comes to Watson, however, my body makes no such instinctive preparations.

Since the way she normally acts is, for all intents and purposes, just like a guy, I can't help but let down my guard around here.

And the second she does something truly girl-like-

I find myself in my current situation, my blood pressure having jumped to the brink of danger in a flash.

"...Tohyama, kun. How are you? The horses are looking quite good today, too."

As I wordlessly waited, Watson coyly greeted me.

The demure aura she produced once again reminded me she was a girl. Ugh.

Unlike the coquettish and unreserved Riko, the feeling Watson gave off seemed much more appropriate for a girl her age.

Calm down, keep it cool Kinji.

I'd already fallen into Hysteria Mode here once before, no need to make that mistake again.

"Er, you alright there Watson? This 'is' pretty close."

"I'm alright. I even think it's quite, quite comfortable! Oh, and uh, I've told you before. When I'm dressed like this, you're to call me 'Elle'."[11]

"Uh, yeah. Sorry about that, Elle."

"I sure hope everything will go well today. I'll do my best."

"As will I."

Do my best not to enter Hysteria Mode that is.

I thought to myself that I'd better take a deep breath, calm myself down a little, when just as I inhaled-

Crap. I'd achieved the opposite effect. Inhaling deeply had only served to fill my lungs and nostrils with the sweet aroma emanating from Watson. What the heck was I thinking?

Thanks to having self-destructed, I found myself 'just' on the edge of falling into Hysteria Mode.

"Alright then. Today, I'll do it, Tohyama."

"Do what?"

"Rest easy."

"Huh?"

"It's only on the cheek. Not, not, not the lips! Let's leave that for next time!"

"That's why I'm asking you-"

Right as I was about to repeat my question, Watson's face, flush to the tips of her ears, suddenly raised her head-

And lightly placed her lips on my cheek.

-...!

This must be what they mean when they say that things come in threes.[12]

First Kaname, then Aria, and now, the real curveball, Watson, had kissed me.

That makes it three on the month already. When did I become such a celebrity?

"...!"

"I, I did it!"

Watson seemed wholeheartedly ecstatic as she bounded towards me.

Her soft arms, chest, waist- her entire body stuck to me like glue. She really is a girl.

"I did it, Tohyama! Counting on you for rehabilitation was the right decision after all. Only after actually doing it do I now understand. How, hmm, how do I describe this...It's really something that fills you with joy. Without a doubt, this is a necessary step on my path to becoming a girl. Ok, let's give it another go, or rather, several."

Saying that, she again pecked me on the cheek...and not just a few times.

"Stop, stop! Once is more than enough!"

"I want, I want more. Tohyama, I like...I like you- that's how the setting goes. That's the only reason."

What the hell kind of club is this? Whatever happened to the horses!?

Unlike the sexy, mature ambiance of Riko and Shirayuki, Watson felt more like a young girl...which for some reason, only served to make her seem all the cuter. Consequently,

I embraced Watson, having entered into Mezza Hysteria-

Which, though mild, was yet indisputably Hysteria Mode.

-At that moment.

My slightly enhanced senses picked up a sound-

~scritch~ ~scritch~ ~scritch~

I once again the sound of gritted teeth, gnashing in anger, drifted over from the other side of the door.

Looking through the keyhole, I met someone's gaze!

"-Wait, WAIT! Elle!"

"Tohyama, Tohyama."

"Not that! I know you're excited by the results of your rehabilitation, but I need you to calm down."

"...?"

Picking up Watson in a bridal carry, I let her down behind the statue of Venus.

Stealthily placing myself at her side, I stole a glance at the pair of eyes on the other side of the door, which continued to peek through the keyhole.

Furthermore, the "scritching" sound had continued without ceasing, which I could only hear as the sound of teeth gritted in extreme irritation.

Though I desperately hoped that the other person had not been able

to grasp the situation through the small keyhole, I had no expectation that what they *had* seen would lead to them to think that they'd witnessed anything but a lover's tryst.

Turning to Watson, a blank look on her face, I quietly whispered in her ear-

"There's someone watching! Let's end our rehabilitation for today, hurry up and change back."

"-What, what are you saying?"

Watson had abruptly turned so red I wouldn't have been surprised to see steam expelled from atop her head.

She proceeded to frantically extract her male clothes from within the paper bag.

"Hurry! I need to confirm the situation in the hallway."

"Toh, Tohyama! Help me! I'm shaking so hard I can't change on my own!"

In response to her voice, trying its hardest not to cry, without allowing myself the slightest glance of her flesh-

I pulled her shirt from the bag.

As Watson slowly removed her top in a panic, arms and legs trembling, I turned my head, and again assessed the situation on the other side of the door.

Whoever it was had seemed to realize we'd noticed their presence, as their prying glance had disappeared from the keyhole.

My ears also picked up the sound of someone sprinting down the hallway. They seemed to have made a precipitous retreat.

(That rat...)

No matter how you look at it, normally when you'd run into a guy-girl pair in a place where no one ought to be...

You'd mind your own business, and pretending you hadn't seen a thing, quietly leave.

Though I didn't have the opportunity to explain our situation more fully, the two of us were, indisputably, both afflicted individuals, and that we might transcend our impairments, were undergoing rehabilitation. And yet someone had had the nerve to snoop!

"We'd better get out of here, Watson. Whoever it was is now gone, but if they went to grab someone else, this could be trouble."

"Ah, mm."

As Watson seemed to have finished changing-

I stuffed her skirt into the bag, and taking her hand, charged towards the door, which I opened without delay.

At which point, Watson refused to move a step further.

"What's the matter? We need to leave *now*."

"Wait, wait a moment, Tohyama. My lapels need to be fixed."

Watson fixed the lapels of her coat with her left hand. Looking further, it seemed only part of her shirt was tucked into her pants, quite the sloppy look. Whatever, I had no time to look after her.

Thinking thusly, I roughly pulled Watson out of the art equipment room with me.

"Eh? Tohyama-kun and...Watson-kun?"

When who did we chance upon, but our classmate whom had just ascended the stairway-

Assault's pretty-boy, Shiranui.

Shiranui's eyes nearly popped out of his head in shock.

In his hands were copper plates used for etching; it seemed he'd been asked by the art teacher to help carry things?

Having caught sight of Shiranui, Watson instinctively covered her chest, which, unlike Aria, was only flat by reason of having been bound by a sarashi. [13]

With the way she was dressed, a glance was all it would take for anyone to realize that she'd only just put on her clothes, and in a hurry at that.

Seeing me struck absolutely speechless, and the nearly-frightened-to-tears Watson hiding behind my back, Shiranui-

"Um..."

His face showed he dearly wanted to ask, "What in God's name happened here?" but didn't know how.

"..."

My face frozen like a plaster bust, I frantically tapped my Hysteria Mode-enhanced mind for assistance.

The voyeur from before had fled the scene, so it probably wasn't Shiranui.

(But this current situation is no less dangerous!)

Within my brain-

An image of Shiranui-meijin facing off against Tohyama-ryuou in a shogi match floated to the surface.[14]

On the board, Shiranui's ferocious offensive has begun. Against the attack of Shiranui, Tohyama must defend.

I turned to Watson for aid, but her forehead was glued to my back, her head buried against me. It looks like this girl, upon falling into a panic, has the tendency to shut down like the power's been cut, leaving everything to others to fix. How cunning.

(Looking at this objectively, our situation's not good. SO NOT GOOD!)

What Shiranui has seen is as follows:

In the supposedly empty optional-class building, from within the confines of the art equipment room...

Those who are definitely not participating in any art classes, or alternatively, those who have no valid reason to be here at this time - Watson and I - were seen.

Furthermore, it looks like within that same room, Watson had removed his clothes.[15]

To continue the shogi analogy, my rook's already been captured by his bishop.

No, in reality, with the situation being that I'd been seen hiding in the art equipment room with a "girl who'd taken off her clothes, engaged in some unknown activity", I should actually say that I was behind a hundred, no, a thousand moves.

Though I couldn't reject this situation strongly enough, if this incident were taken as a guy-girl rendezvous, then that'd be one thing.

The by-far larger problem was-

Shiranui doesn't know Watson's a girl.

Instead, he thinks she's a guy.

In other words, from Shiranui's perspective-

Watson (a guy) and I had just exited the art equipment room where "he'd taken off his clothes as part of some unknown activity".

(Doesn't that make check?!)

In my shogi-filled mind, both my gold and silver generals had already been captured.

Watson's good looks were well known throughout the school. During the Ristorante Mask activity, many male students had lost

their minds over her sailor uniform-clad appearance. That is to say, she was a guy well beloved by other male students (although she was actually a girl).

And who was the first to raise his hand against her, but the notorious playboy - me. In other words, Tohyama Kinji, this second year high school student, had already grown tired of toying with women, and had decided to give pretty boys a taste.

-That's probably pretty much what Shiranui's thinking right now?

In my mind, both my knight and lance had just disappeared.

Adding fuel to the fire was the fact that Watson and I were holding hands, and could thus be seen to have quite the mutual affection. Because Watson's clothes were also disheveled, one might surmise that our relationship had gone quite far.

At last, the entirety of my pawn force vanished from atop the game board.

(I, I need to defend myself-)

Even if all that remained was my king, with his forces scattered in disarray, the ever disgraceful Tohyama-ryuou's slightly Hysteria Mode-enhanced mind made one final play: "Because I was considering taking up art next year, I thought I'd try my hand at a sketch. Watson here agreed to be my model."

This is too forced, isn't it? Regrettably, because I was only partially in Hysteria Mode, this was the best I could come up with.

Even though I'd come up with a similar excuse that time with Fuuma, she'd only fallen for it because she was an idiot. Shiranui, on the other hand, was quite bright. There was no way this was going to cut it.

Nonetheless, if I didn't do *something*, I'd lose by simply running out of time.

Hurry- hurry my mouth! Say something! Real men need guts; who cares what it is, just try!

"Shi, Shiranui! Listen to me! The reason why I'm here with another guy-"

As I opened my mouth at last,

Shiranui extended a hand as if to say, "You don't need to say another word."

Then, speaking in that gentlemanly manner only possible for such a rare Butei specimen as he,

"Don't worry about it. This isn't the kind of thing the public ever needs to know. My lips are sealed, I promise."

He then gave a stiff, awkward smile.

From that warm and gentle smile, belying the terrible misunderstanding that lay behind it, shone the kindness of that heart as wide as the ocean, openly accepting the two who had tasted of the forbidden fruit.

Not that he was able to completely hide his shock, his fingers trembling.

Within my mind, I saw Tohyama-ryuou's complete and utter destruction, whom, with nowhere left to retreat, could only bow his head and accept defeat.

"Toh, Tohyama, let's go."

Having spoken not a word until this moment, Watson pushed me from behind.

Taking me, whose mind had flooded completely with white, out of the optional-classes building.

5th Ammo - Surprise Rose

As we made our way back to my dorm in Watson's Porsche, an awkward silence filled the car.

The atmosphere was pretty much what you'd expect from a situation where a lovers' tryst had been discovered by a peer.

By the way, Watson had made a speedy recovery, and in an attempt to comfort me, offered the following words, "Don't worry about it, Shiranui gave us his word he wouldn't say a thing."

Well, on that point, we're agreed. Shiranui's not the type to run his mouth.

The problem is...just how am I supposed to face him now? He's one of my few friends, or rather, without him, doesn't that only leave Mutou? What's more, the next time Shiranui sees Mutou and I together, in all likelihood, he'd think some unnecessary thoughts. Haha.

Inwardly mocking myself, I exited the car in front of the dorms.

Though falling five times while making my way up to my room on the fifth floor, I, at last, found myself at the entrance to my room.

Kaname was nowhere to be found, likely having left to buy one thing or another.

I lifelessly crawled across the floor, making my way to the sofa, where I fiddled with my Beretta and brooded dangerously to myself, "With this, I could end things whenever I wanted..."

My heart heavy, my mind seemed to want to escape reality, instead seeking solace in sleep. Perhaps what I was experiencing were the aftereffects of Mezza Hysteria? Lethargy, after all, was quite common once the effects of Hysteria Mode had passed.

-Well, even though it's only 6 PM, let's rest for a bit. Just keeping

my eyes open is an effort...

...That's three outs...

...*CHOP! CHOP! CHOP!*...

I awoke to the sound of people talking and what seemed to be a knife cutting something on a chopping board.

(...?)

Raising my head to peek in the direction of the kitchen, I caught sight of Kaname, who had already returned.

Judging by the smell of curry in the air, it seemed she was making dinner.

It was now...7 o' clock? It looked like I'd been asleep for an hour or so.

"...Ah, Onii-chan. I'm sorry, did I wake you?"

Kaname showed me an apologetic smile as she placed sliced carrots into a salad.

"Don't worry about it. It's my fault for falling asleep at such an odd hour."

It might have been because I was better rested, but my condition felt improved. As I picked myself up-

Kaname laid her knife atop the cutting board, washed her hands, and raced to my side.

She *plopped* herself down next to me, giggling as she watched me, smiling from ear to ear.

"...What?"

"Can we chat for a bit? This time is reserved for conversing with your cute little sister."

"Cute little sister? According to you?"

"I've sniffed out every corner of this room with Onii-chan's scent."

"Please don't ignore me, and especially not to say something that weird."

"About that...Onii-chan doesn't have any naughty books? I couldn't find even one."

What...what the hell?

What's with the strange question from out of left field? I'm about ready to drop here, have mercy on me.

"None."

Who the heck would buy something so terrifying?

Why on Earth would I plant a Hysteria Mode land-mine for myself?

"-But that's strange, Onii-chan."

"The strange one here is you, alright? Why would you look for something like that, anyway?"

"I was trying to figure out Onii-chan's preferences. I can't find a common theme among the girls I've seen so far."

"That would be because I don't have any. Why would I have preferences for something I can't stand to begin with?"

"But, but~"

Kaname tugged at my sleeve like a spoiled child.

"I want to know what kinds of things excite Onii-chan. That way I can become the kind of little sister that suits Onii-chan's preferences."

"Why do you have to become anything? Please try and keep things within reason."

As I waved my hands to shoo Kaname away-

She simply revealed a puzzled expression, pulling one leg up on the sofa, and turned to look at me.

This movement completely bared her white thighs from under her miniskirt.

(...Ugh...)

Although it seemed Hysteria Mode was unlikely to react to Kaname, I nonetheless guardedly averted my gaze.

It was probably a result of our topic of conversation, but I quickly realized that I had little immunity against thighs.

The subtle fragrance of women and their thighs - these two things were undeniably a danger to me.

"This isn't the time to hold back, Onii-chan. When a rare delicacy finds itself in front of you, not helping yourself is simply too irrational!"

"Delicacy...?"

This time I was the one with a look of puzzlement.

Kaname stuck out her index finger, adopting a look that said, "Listen, listen～"

"A brother and sister, separated at birth, suddenly reunited. The brother is a high school student, the sister, in junior high. What's more, the sister is utterly adorable."

"...?"

"After being reunited, the two live alone under the same roof. From the photos and videos she's seen, the brother completely matches the sister's preferences. When they finally meet, the sister falls for

him deeply, so deeply she can't help herself."

"...?...?"

"A situation like this, what is it if not a rare delicacy? In «My Sister
Goth», that's how it's always been regarded. That's why 'helping yourself' is only appropriate-"

"-That! Though I'm still not quite clear on things, but that kind of thing only happens in those games Riko plays or manga! Something like that could only happen in a world gone mad."

"That's not right, Onii-chan. It's happened in reality, and right before you, too."

Having taken my response as a rejection of her, she protested strongly.

"If I were to describe this in game terms, we're already in the last stage, Onii-chan. The common route's already over, the affection levels on both sides are at their max. All the various odds and ends of the plot have already been resolved, and you've entered the Kaname route. Even so, Onii-chan's been running all over, and you haven't done a thing to me. If things go on like this, you'll get a bad end, you know!"[16]

Saying this, Kaname grabbed my hand-

And pulled them towards her chest. Ignoring my instinctive attempt to pull away, she deliberately placed my hand atop her breast.

"Just look...My body's just burning up. That's why, Onii-chan, you can do to me what it is guys always want to do. I just know it'll be good."

"That's sick! You've been saying over and over you're my sister, so why would you mention something like, like *that*!"

I immediately brushed off her hand, to which Kaname-

Gave a smile as if about to reveal her hidden trump card.

"Because that way Onii-chan and I can become an Arcanum Duo[17]. It theoretically exists, you know - the strongest brother-sister combo in the world."

"Strongest...brother and sister...?"

"With the ability to trigger one another's HSS, the two of us would become an unrivaled, invincible team."

"Wait just a sec. When you say HSS- are you talking about Hysteria Mode?"

"Hysteria Mode? Is that what you call HSS, Onii-chan? Then yes, within my body exists the gene carrying the ability to enter HSS, that is, Hysteria Mode."

"Wha...what?"

"Because I'm your sister."

...

"-That said, I've never actually entered HSS before, so truth be told, I'd always worried about whether I really could. But after meeting Onii-chan, I'm sure now. I definitely can. The two of us can undoubtedly become this world's strongest pair."

Having spoken this far, Kaname looked as if about to drop another bomb on me.

"Onii-chan is currently a participant in the 'Far East Warfare'. If Onii-chan was willing to enter HSS with me, then I'd be more than willing to help you out. As long as the two of us can enter HSS at will, no matter who the opponent is, they'd not stand a ghost of a chance. Whatever it is Onii-chan wants, or needs, you'd need only stick out your hand and grab it, no?"

-How is it? Not a bad offer, right?

Kaname squinted her eyes, her expression alone sufficient for me to hear the unspoken question.

rose unbidden. More than half of those red stones had fallen into Grenada's grasp, and if we failed to retrieve them, it would spell Aria's doom.

"But uh, well, you see, the catalyst of Hysteria Mode is sex- er sorry, it's love[18]. You know, that kind of thing. An upstanding person wouldn't engage in something like that so casually. Even if you're male and female, you still shouldn't try to force these things."

Kaname laughed, interrupting my half-mumbled response.

"That's exactly right. It's not like we think love is a joke either. Love is no game; it's for war."

With this, I finally understood.

I faintly realized just why it was she pestered me so.

If I posed a simple hypothesis, then this strange situation suddenly began to make sense.

Though I wasn't entirely ready to follow that theory; nevertheless...

Supposing things were as Kaname had said, and we were truly siblings-

Then this girl just might be capable of Hysteria Mode, even if I had never heard so much as a whisper about a female version before.

What's more, her normal abilities had proven more than sufficient to suppress Aria and the others.

More specifically, she, via some unknown method - perhaps even the Los Alamos Elite plan that Watson had mentioned? - had had her physical abilities enhanced. Even though she'd since escaped, from the looks of things, it seemed they still hadn't completely severed their relationship with America.

What worried me was this-

It occurred to me that Kaname's preoccupation with attaining Hysteria Mode was for the goal of further enhancing her abilities.

The problem was, Kaname had yet to enter said state. It seemed she shared a distaste for men no less intense than my distaste for women.

I'm not sure what it is that has her so set on me, but regardless, she seems to have taken a fancy to me.

For this reason, she's chosen me to help her enter Hysteria Mode, and has grown close to me-

Because I'm the only one in this world who can help her obtain the strength she seeks, the partner who can help her enter Hysteria Mode.

Furthermore, it looks like she plans on forming a team with me, becoming a pair who stands above all.

This, putting aside whether or not it's true for a moment, poses a danger in more ways than one.

Suddenly my train of thought was interrupted by Kaname, who leaned in against me.

That unparalleled ability to seize the opportunity was reminiscent of Riko.

"Those with HSS have superlative fighting abilities, but this is countered by a weakness to the opposite sex of equal degree. Because of this condition, the other gender will never understand us, especially during this youthful period where sexual excitement occurs easily enough."

"Um, well..."

Facing me, who'd been left speechless by her words, Kaname's eyes, the color of the deep ocean, raised to meet mine.

"Even if someone else likes you, it'd only be a superficial feeling for the Hysteria Mode you, and not the real you. This misunderstanding

inevitably becomes the foundation for mistaken feelings. In other words, in this world, there will never be a girl who could ever truly understand you, and thus truly love you. I am the sole exception, as one who bears the same cross."

She spoke in an alluring tone: were we not the same after all? Was it not thus natural for us to lick one another's wounds, to find comfort in one another?

"Only if Onii-chan continues to be with me can you truly experience love. Even though you've said over and over that this is something wrong, something strange, but in truth, isn't it just the opposite? I am the only person who can truly have a normal relationship with Onii-chan, the only one who could ever be Onii-chan's true love."

Having thus spoken, Kaname pulled something out: a «My
Sister
Goth» box.

"Even though Onii-chan loves me, it seems you're still not ready to talk about it yet. That's why you're resisting this, but it's okay, we can talk later. Right now, I can't wait any longer. For the moment, you just need to do this one thing with me...yeah, just this...is enough."

She flipped over the «My
Sister
Goth» package.

(...!)

Because I've never felt any particular reason to, this is the first time I've taken a good look at it.

On the back of the box, in stark contrast to the intentionally cute designs drawn on its front, is what can only be described as an extremely provocative image.

"What, what the hell are you saying! What do you mean 'you just need to do this one thing with me'! Have you completely lost your mind!?"

I desperately looked away from the anime-ish illustrations.

"Onii-chan, you're the one who's not making any sense here. Ethics are just a headache to anyone with HSS. Let me say something - love is not the catalyst for Hysteria Mode. As long as people have the desire to do so, they can easily separate these two things. Love on one hand, *that* on the other. So you see, there's no problem here."

Kaname expounded upon a topic I had intentionally never before considered.

"Because Onii-chan is a guy, you've probably had to fight hard against your natural sex drive. Spending everyday having to suppress those urges, it's been hard, hasn't it? But there's no need to worry about that anymore. Just think of me as a toy. That's how I see it anyway."

"What, what do you mean 'toy'...?"

"I am Onii-chan's plaything."

As she said this, she suddenly pressed against me, all her soft parts, from top to bottom, glued against my body.

Her body language simply shouted, "This is it."

"That is to say, even if you were to consider this as mutual exploitation, I wouldn't mind. Even if the order's been reversed, there've definitely been cases before where love has sprouted from such actions- such things are recorded in the TellaNA system."[19]

From the body of the gently smiling Kaname, came the sweet fragrance of caramel.

Her skill at speaking and her beguiling movements reminded me of Riko.

At the same time I finally came to appreciate something else, Kaname's intellect.

Kaname had previously declared to me that she'd acquire all the

skills of Aria, Shirayuki, and Riko, who I 'loved'. Though in her own unique way, it now occurred to me that she'd matched Aria's unyielding strength, Shirayuki's spirit of devotion, and Riko's feminine coquettishness. And all that in order to better appeal to me.

This girl had completely captured the distinctive features of those three, and that simply by analyzing the various things they'd left in the room - their books, and games, and such - and then modified them in order to match her own style. Even though she had the assistance of that TellaNA intelligence interface, but to come this far in two weeks was simply beyond words.

Taking this into consideration, even though she seemed like quite the strange individual, er, *was* quite the strange individual-

It doesn't look like the name "man-made genius" is just for show. She was undeniably brilliant.

-This is bad. People like her are dangerous, because they know how to hide their intelligence. They understand well how to use words to lay siege to their opponent, and thus engaging in conversation with them can be dangerous...or so we'd been taught in Inquesta classes.

-I needed to end this conversation ASAP, even if it meant drastic measures. I can't allow her to keep leading me by the nose.

If things took a turn for the worse, then things would end up like they did in that locker room, and she'd do something strange once more.

"...!"

I shook myself vigorously, in an effort to pry Kaname loose.

"Aaa!"

Exclaiming in surprise, Kaname dropped to the sofa, and tried to get up.

I made ready my escape.

(Now then...no, wait.)

It wasn't just because she wanted to become stronger that she sought to use me to enter Hysteria Mode.

Nor was it simply because she liked me that she'd approached me like this.

No, something else was making her anxious.

Though she had obviously not spoken a word about this, but I could more or less understand what was happening deep within a girl's heart.

This was the first time I'd ever experienced this.

Even if I hadn't heard a word of explanation, but I still intuitively understood.

I'm not sure how, whether it was because of some similarity in the way we act or speak or what, but I can tell what it is she feels within her heart.

And I can also tell that...from the bottom of her heart...she really likes me so much it's abnormal.

-But...forgive me.

"...Kaname, I don't know who you are, or what your purpose is, but none of that matters to me. Hysteria Mode, if you ask me, is an accident waiting to happen. If I could, I'd discard it without a second thought. Accordingly, I have no particular desire to familiarize myself with it, especially to the point of discarding all morality like you suggest. And you, value yourself more; don't abuse yourself like this."

As I spoke, I thought to myself that it might be best if I slept over at Mutou's tonight.

After I turned to head down the hallway, I came to the sudden realization that my pistol wasn't in my belt, where I expected, and as I again turned to retrieve it-

"-Onii-chan is being so unreasonable-"

I heard Kaname mutter under her breath.

She flipped around and dashed into the kitchen, where she ferociously grabbed hold of a kitchen knife.

"-Oi!"

As I shouted in dismay, she moved to cut me off, blocking my path to the hallway.

In the darkness of the unlit hallway, her eyes gleamed.

She's not budging an inch!

"Onii-chan, that's three outs, and three outs calls for a change."

Kaname's pupils are dilated, her teeth gritted.

-What, what's going on here? What's with the violent outburst?

This sudden change in personality is almost like two different people.

Is it because she's decided that further debate is futile and more extreme measures are now warranted?

No, I don't think that's all there is to it.

I've always felt like Kaname's constantly repressing something...

And because our conversation was not resolved to her satisfaction, her patience had finally given way.

"That reminds me, Onii-chan."

From within the darkness of the hallway, Kaname's voice came forth, as well as the quiet sound of her bare feet advancing across the wood floor.

Hidden in the shadows, I could just make out her face, her frozen smile cold as death.

That expression was as different as could be from the beguiling smile she'd shown earlier, filling me instead with spine-chilling horror.

"What...what is it?"

"Onii-chan, you haven't broken your promise with me, have you?"

"Pro, promise?"

Oh...

Is she referring to the promise she extracted from me when I demanded that she not attack without reason: "Promise me, that you will neither touch nor embrace another girl."

That's what she's talking about, right?

"-As long as Onii-chan is honest in his confession, then for each betrayal I will punish you but once. If you try and hide things from me, however, I will stab you ten times over for each lie. Now, Onii-chan, how many times have you broken your promise?"

~step~ ~step~

Kaname continued to walk towards me, gripping her knife with both hands.

As Kaname stepped into the light of the living room, the sharpened point of her knife was first to cross the threshold.

"Go ahead and say it. C'mon, just tell me."

It seems she plans to thrust straight forward. Under the fluorescent light of the room, the knife flashed dangerously- and aimed directly at my throat.

The distance, about four meters.

Given her abilities, this was already within her Killing Range.

I needed to do something, and quickly, or I might meet my end.

(-My gun...!)

It wasn't holstered, so it must be behind me, by the sofa. If it wasn't there, however...if Kaname had already hidden it...No, I had no way to be sure, and turning my head to look would be suicidal. Such a careless mistake might see her knife embedded in the back of my skull.

...That being the case, the only weapon at my disposal was the butterfly knife in my pocket.

But if the motion of me pulling it out were to set her off, I could well find her flying at me.

Moreover, back in the Shinagawa Geofront, all she'd needed handle Aria, Shirayuki, and Reki was a blade.

It was possible her weapon hid some secret, but that aside, her physical abilities were more than dangerous enough already. My current situation was way too disadvantageous.

It seemed, at best, all I could hope for was to block the blade.

In brief, my best chances of survival lay in attempting to placate her.

"The, the promise. I've kept it."

As I tried to convince her, I retreated backwards ever so slowly.

"You've also been doing your best to keep your end, right? That's why there's no need for this. Hurry up and put that away."

I broke out into a cold sweat.

"Onii-chan, you're hiding something from me."

~STEP~

Kaname closed the distance between us.

"Onii-chan, you've hidden three things from me, so I guess I'll stab

you 30 times?"

Having finally stepped fully into the light...this time she wore no expression at all-

Almost like a robot about to carry out its programmed routine.

"St, stop...!"

"I have no desire to hurt someone I love, but because Onii-chan lied, I have no choice. Love requires sacrifice, and sacrifice, Onii-chan, *hurts*."

It's, it's no use. This wasn't a situation I could negotiate my way out of from the start. She's completely gone over the edge.

And yet-

On the other hand, this might be my only chance.

Those are the eyes of a predator. The eyes of a mind having lost all reason.

I could hear a soft *-pant- -pant-* as well.

When someone's in such a state, their abilities decrease. Even if their strength increases, their precision is reduced drastically. Furthermore, what Kaname holds in her hands is not really a weapon, but rather a simple kitchen knife.

There's nothing I can do but pray for luck, and gamble with her.

"Put the knife down!"

As I threatened her, I pulled my butterfly knife out.

Flipping out the blade in an instant,

"-Why!?"

I caught the blade of Kaname, who howled as she flew at me, with my own.

CLANG!

As our blade edges clashed, sparks flew. Fortunately, the many hundreds of times I'd practiced during my time in Assault the previous year came in handy, and I caught her blade between the grooves of my knife.

Twisting my blade viciously, I snapped the blade of her knife clean off.

-But it seemed, Kaname had never intended on relying on the knife to begin with.

"Why won't Onii-chan understand!?"

-BANG!

"Uoh!"

I...I was just shot!

Even if I was wearing my bulletproof uniform, I was still shot at close range.

Worse, she'd simultaneously kicked my right knee, which hadn't quite healed.

Looking closely, she had my Beretta.

-From the beginning, she'd only used the knife as a distraction, planning from the start to seal my movements with the gun.

In front of Kaname, so much more resourceful than I, I fell, sprawled across the floor.

"I've always been upfront with Onii-chan! Whatever you wanted, I accepted! And yet Onii-chan is *still* like this!"

Kaname held her finger over the trigger, as she howled into the empty air.

Both her eyes and her lips were swollen in anger, and she seemed

primed to open fire at any moment.

Relying on my unhurt leg and my arms, I desperately pulled backwards.

The entrance to the hallway was already blocked by Kaname, so that route had been sealed.

(The...balcony...)

I need to crawl my way there, then man up and make the jump, escaping into the sea. That's my only hope.

In order to avoid revealing my plan, I glanced at the mirror to reaffirm the balcony as a viable escape plan.

What I saw was...

Something I'd last seen in the video of the Shinagawa Geofront engagement-

A floating X-shaped strip of cloth, flitting this way and that like a dragonfly.

That was Kaname's armament which simultaneously handled offense and defense.

It seems she's had it simply hover over the male dorms this entire time.

That piece of cloth hovered just outside of the balcony, almost as if warning me against entry.

Kaname faced me down, whom had nowhere left to run.

"-Did you really think you could escape?"

Slanting her eyes, she smiled.

Her gaze reminded me of a hunter staring down wounded prey.

"You were really trying to run just now, weren't you, Onii-chan? Such disobedient feet you have. Even though you love me so much,

why would your feet try to betray you like that? Oh, that's right. It's because you can still walk, isn't it?"

Kaname raised her bare leg and viciously stomped on my injured knee.

"Onii-chan, I saw it all, you know? Fuuma Hina, Kanzaki Aria, and...this was really too careless of me, I could never have imagined Elle Watson was also a girl? How absurd."

"..."

Memories of the past few days bubbled forth from within my mind.

When I ran into Fuuma-

In the bamboo grove nearby, we'd found the bamboo broken and in general disarray.

The kiss with Aria on the rooftop-

The word "TRAITOR" etched all around the air conditioning radiator.

The eyes glaring at us through the keyhole as Watson and I engaged in rehabilitation.

That was all...

(That damn stalker!)

Those were all traces of Kaname, stalking me...!

"Hey, Onii-chan, tell me what needs to happen here. Be honest...should I break your legs? If I do that, then you won't be able to walk anymore, let alone leave your room."

Almost as if playing a piano, her toes gently caressed my knee.

"Oh, I know, why don't we do this? Onii-chan can just stay on the sofa forever, and don't worry, I'll take care of everything."

She...she wants to make me a prisoner in my own home!?

Kaname revealed a bright expression completely at odds with the terrifying words coming out of her mouth.

"Afterwards, I'll just force Onii-chan to fall into Hysteria Mode. Good, sounds like a plan. If I do it like this, you'll understand, won't you, Onii-chan?"

Kaname gradually raised her leg, preparing to plunge it down with great force!

"...!"

This is bad...!

From the look in her eyes, it didn't seem she planned to stop with just my right knee.

And if that wasn't enough to calm her down, then perhaps even my arms...

If that were to happen, then I'd really be up a creek without a paddle.

I broke out in a cold sweat due to the pain, and out of sheer desperation,

"Kaname! ...I...I get it already! I'll, I'll try to do what you've asked!"

I groaned as I covered my knee with my hands.

"*TRY*...?"

"That's right! Whatever you want, whenever you want, it's ok! I'll accept you!"

Truth be told, even though she was an amazingly beautiful girl...but as I thought of the highly provocative imagery I'd seen on the back of that box actually occurring to me, I just about fainted.

Then again, compared to becoming Kaname's prisoner, with her holding power over my life and death, this was definitely still preferable.

Beggars can't be choosers, after all.

Moreover, this path carried the possibility of seeing Kaname leave my side eventually.

"Onii-chan..."

Having heard my answer, Kaname seemed to lose all strength.

Nor did she finish her attack on my knee, instead returning her foot to the wood floor once more.

"I'm so happy Onii-chan finally understands. As expected, Onii-chan is a kind and tender person: willing to understand me, willing to accept me, willing to love me. This just makes me so happy."

Kaname stared off into space, mumbling to herself.

Picking my words carefully, I continued,

"However, if I'm unable to enter Hysteria Mode as you predict, then you need to give this up. You've said that your hope is to see the two of us in Hysteria Mode, fighting together, right? Well, a weapon that can't be relied on is no weapon at all. If such a thing were to fail in the midst of a real battle, we'd be in unwarranted danger."

-From my experience, Kaname is not a trigger for my Hysteria Mode.

Thinking back to that time in the locker room, even with such a high degree of contact between us, Hysteria Mode had failed to activate.

Taking that as reference, I was fairly confident I could withstand anything she could throw at me.

If things continued down their present course, Kaname would probably end up leaving, wouldn't she?

In other words, in order to see her eventually leaving me, I'd have to first allow her to get closer. To put it succinctly, I'd lose the

battle, but win the war.

"Well, if you put it like that...ok. Alright, I get it. I'll do my best to make Onii-chan enter HSS, and with an intensity you've never experienced before!"

Kaname seems to be quite motivated, clenching her fist and breathing excitedly.

Hrm. It seems I've instead kindled her fighting spirit.

Well, it's not like this wasn't a last resort.

I didn't have any way of dealing with her rampage in any case.

"..."

I wiped the sweat from my forehead, and pulled my injured knee towards me.

"-Onii-chan."

At which point, Kaname, almost as if switching masks, broke out in the most adorable smile.

She gave off an aura of utter normality, as if her violent outbreak was just an illusion. Bending down, she laid the Beretta on the floor.

She then extended her arm, slender, as befitted her age, to me, before cheerfully pulling me to my feet.

"Then, let's eat. The curry's already ready."

-Kaname's style of wielding blades was highly reminiscent of a soldier's.

In short, she fights to kill.

(If by some chance, she *really* tries to attack me...)

Even if she doesn't intend it, the possibility of my death isn't zero.

That girl loses all semblance of reason once she loses it, and the resulting lack of precision might just be enough.

Incidentally, after we'd finished dinner, Kaname had suddenly declared "I need to review something really quick", before grabbing «My
Sister
Goth» and disappearing into her room.

I spent the night in trepidation, but she never reappeared.

Before heading off to bed, I figured it best if I tried to figure out what exactly the deal was with this «My
Sister
Goth» game. A quick Internet search revealed images of a younger sister binding her older brother with chains, whipping him and the like, which I dared not investigate further. The hell *is* this game?

If Kaname had been using this game as reference, then it looks like until now, I'd been making all the wrong choices.

That being the case, once she finally decided to make her move, I hadn't the slightest clue what was actually going to happen.

It was possible those two circumstances I had just seen would happen to me.

(I need to act quickly to protect myself...!)

In this manner, the day passed.

As Saturday morning dawned, I seized upon Kaname's carelessness to make my escape, making my way to Odaiba Seaside Park.

Before me lay the ocean, behind me a vast lawn. Amidst the scenic landscape, I found a bench upon which to wait for a certain someone.

In my hand I held something which hardly suited me - a bouquet of roses.

They were wrapped in paper, however, so I wasn't embarrassed about the image I gave off.

-So why was I sitting here, holding these roses? Well, it's a bit complicated.

Today's meeting had a certain purpose. I was here to rendezvous with a bodyguard.

Kaname had clearly made an exception to the rule of individuals allowed to live with me, that is, family.

And so I thought:

If I had someone superbly strong became a family member, able to enter and leave my place as they desired-

Then even if Kaname tried to do something horrifying to me, they could rescue me from what would inevitably be a tragic ending.

Taking the members of Deen as a starting point, I began to compile a mental list of the strongest members. Unfortunately, the majority of them were unable to pass as a member of my family.

I mean, after all, whether you were counting by ethnicity or by appearance, I was 100% Japanese.

In that respect, Aria, Riko, and Watson were out of the picture. Jeanne, well, she was never *in* the picture to begin with. Reki was a descendant of the Genji, but there's no way her acting abilities would hold up. Tamamo would have been optimal - if I had a pair of fox ears growing out of my head, that is.

That left only-

Shirayuki.

She was, like me, quite distinctively Japanese.

Since we were childhood friends, I think she could pass as a half-sister of mine.

When it comes to her last name...hmm, how about she was adopted into the Hotogi family to serve as a miko, but she's now returning to the Tohyama household?

So for the moment, she'll be "Tohyama Shirayuki", a member of my family.

Even then, it's not like I don't understand that this setting is terribly, *incredibly* forced...

(...But it's not like I have any other choice!)

Moreover-

Today was November 14th, coincidentally Shirayuki's birthday.

Even though I'd completely forgotten about it, but this morning Konayuki had sent a lacquered chest all the way from the Hotogi Shrine in Aomori.

I'd given her a call in protest only to have her announce it was a gift for her sister's birthday. She told me: "Because Onee-sama is rarely home, rather than cause the Post Office an inconvenience, I decided to send it to Tohyama-sama instead. Please do me a favor and give it to her for me." Having been treated like a gofer, I snarled back, "Did you ever consider whether it was an inconvenience to *me*!?" and hung up the phone.

Although truth be told, I ought to feel rather fortunate.

In order to coax Shirayuki into acting as a member of my family, I'd planned on celebrating her birthday with her. Because of all that'd happened with Kaname recently, she'd been quite distant.

The problem was, after celebrating Aria's birthday, I've not done anything similar since, so I'm rather lacking in confidence. I'd subsequently given a call to the Girl's Customer Support Center - Jeanne. She'd answered me in a stern voice, saying, "Flowers. There's not a girl in this world who wouldn't be happy to receive

flowers. It's pretty much a law of nature."

And so, first thing in the morning, I'd set out to a part of Academy Island where I'd never previously set foot, the flower shop, and purchased a bouquet of roses. When it came to flowers, I only knew about chrysanthemums and tulips, but the florist had confidently recommended to me: "If you're going to give a gift to a girl, it has to be roses."

And that's why I'm sitting here, holding roses, and waiting for Shirayuki.

The florist lady had told me, "It's gotta be a surprise", and had thus wrapped the roses in a huge piece of paper. The problem was, I had no idea what was an appropriate time to pull them out in order to constitute a surprise.

Whatever, forget it. It's just Shirayuki anyway.

But man, these flowers are huge. Since I didn't know the first thing about flowers, I'd thrown the last of my savings into this. They really were heavy though; if I'd known earlier, I'd have only bought half.

As I sat, musing over the morning's happenings, I slowly massaged my knee.

(It really hurts still...Sure hope the ligament's not injured...)

Since I'd dealt with Kaname's tantrum more or less, walking wasn't a problem...

But because I only had the vaguest memory of Assault's lessons on how to wrap a joint injury, it still rather hurt.

(Might as well just get rid of this makeshift brace. This probably isn't the time to be stingy, I really should go pay Ambulace a visit.)

Having run a little low on patience, I rolled up my pant leg, and ripped the dressing off.

Rubbing my knee a bit, I returned to the bench.

"Kin, Kin-chan, good morning."

It seemed Shirayuki had come from the direction of the lawn.

As she met my gaze, she gave an embarrassed smile.

Coming over to the bench, she held down the fluttering skirt of her sailor uniform with her hand.

"-I mentioned this on the phone, but you're sure no one followed you?"

"Nn, nn. Yeah, I double-checked the whole way here."

Shirayuki nodded vigorously as I again checked our surroundings.

Kaname doesn't seem to take stalking me lightly, so you can never be too sure.

This was in accordance with something I'd learned in Inquesta previously: If you have a rendezvous to make, and you can't be sure you're not being followed, try to meet in a space where it's easy to fully assess your surroundings.

Because this was a wide open space without so much as a shadow to hide in, I was able to ensure there was no one following us.

That said, there still existed the possibility of long range surveillance.

For that reason, we'd probably best get indoors as soon as possible.

"Um, about that. Kin-chan said you had something important to talk about. What was it?"

"It's not something we can talk about here. Let's head somewhere else first. Let's see..."

Saying that, I glanced around quickly, flowers in hand.

At the far end of the lawn, I could make out the recently annexed white chapel of a Nikko Hotel.

Good, we'll head there.

Even Kaname wouldn't dare ambush someone in a sacred place like that, right?

"Let's make our way to that church."

I rose, only to have my knee scream in pain.

I guess my decision to discard the bandage was poorly made after all.

Nonetheless, it wasn't yet at the point where I couldn't walk. We'd better move.

"O-ok. Kin-chan, eh? That's..."

Shirayuki glanced at the package in my hand, voice rising in anticipation.

Oi oi oi. Don't tell me the surprise is ruined already. Looking closely, I can see a few stems sticking out. Ms. Florist, would it have killed you to have wrapped these a bit better?

As was the norm for a church, the chapel was open to all, though with nary a soul in sight.

Natural light poured in through the skylight, and reflected off the white walls, filling the room with warmth and light. What a comforting place.

"Ooh. How pretty. It's so romantic."

Shirayuki took in her surroundings with a look of enchantment evident on her face.

At first I'd been worried at the prospect of bringing a miko into a Christian church, but it seems my fears were groundless.

It seems that Shirayuki had no difficulty keeping the two separate.

Then again, if she wasn't capable of at least this much, then there's no way she'd have been able to make it in the madhouse that was SSR.

Although even I felt like I was overdoing it, but standing near the door, or rather, a keyhole, reminded me of bad memories, so I walked down the aisle, deeper into the chapel.

Shirayuki reverently followed behind me.

"Everytime I'm with Kin-chan, my heart seems to skip a beat."

Shirayuki laughed with her hands on her cheeks, twisting her body this way and that.

Skip a beat?

Is it because of all the danger we've faced together?

Does that mean she has presentiments of battle from merely being around me? Well, I guess that way of thinking isn't wrong, Shirayuki.

"-I guess it's going to be like this everyday from today on. I should prepare myself."

"From today on...? Everyday...? What, what do you mean?"

Shirayuki responded strangely to my use of "everyday", so I instead pulled her with me, one step at a time, up the stairs.

"...!"

My knee chose this point to start throbbing again. Man, that decision to rip off the dressing was really a bad idea.

-Against my will, I fell to one knee.

About to tumble to the floor, I quickly grasped Shirayuki's hand.

It's probably too late for this to be a pleasant surprise, but what the

heck, why don't I give her the flowers now.

I subsequently tore the wrapping paper, revealing the crimson red roses within.

"-Kin, Kin-chan?"

"Happy Birthday, Shirayuki. There's more, but let me first say this- what I'm about to say, you're free to accept or reject as you wish."

From the skylight above, a pillar of light shone down, lavishing radiance directly upon me and Shirayuki, still in shock.

Shining above Shirayuki's lustrous black hair was a beam of resplendent light, like the halo of an angel.

"But before you say anything, remember this. Far from coming to me easily, I agonized over this, but my answer is still the same- You're it. If you turn me down, there's no one else. If it's not you, then it's no one."

My knee throbbed once more. I'd better wrap this up as soon as possible, and head over to Ambulace for a rest.

That does it for the prologue, let's leave the details for another time.

Forget beating around the bush, I'm just going to cut to the point here.

Doing my utmost to maintain my kneeling posture, I raised my head to look at Shirayuki and asked,

"-Shirayuki. Won't you please become Tohyama Shirayuki?"

As I spoke-

~GONG~ ~GONG~

The church bells rang.[20] They're announcing the time, I guess?

That's just perfect. Even if someone happened to be eavesdropping, the bells would have covered things up just fine.

At this unexpected turn of good fortune, I couldn't help but grin.

Shirayuki's limpid eyes shone bright-

"Yes!"

Eh?

Surprisingly she agreed without further ado.

Man, just how submissive can you be? I haven't even explained all the details yet.

Speaking of which...

What's the deal with her expression?

-It's the face of someone who has at last realized their life's desire-

Clutching the roses to her chest, she seems moved beyond words.

"In other words, from today on, we're family. So please live with me once more. I know preparations will take some time, but I'm willing to wait."

"...Ok!...Kin-chan-sama...Kin-chan...sama!"

Did the light get into her eyes or something? Shirayuki bowed her head, burying it amidst her flowers.

"I understand, even if it's Shirayuki, it's still not an easy thing to so readily become a member of my family."

This was, after all, a task which combined bodyguard duties with undercover work.

For this kind of thing, I, who had spent half a year in Inquesta was probably better suited to the task.

Well, I guess I'll take the lead, then. Let me let her know.

"It's ok. Just leave it all to me. All you need to do is follow."

Ignoring the pain in my knee, I made an effort to stand.

"Alright...Aah, Kin-chan, thank you. From the time we were small, I, I've always been waiting for this exact moment to come."

...?

"But it came so suddenly...! This is the greatest day of my life!"

Shirayuki...san?

Shirayuki gripped her flowers with both hands, raising her head to the heavens as if beckoning.

Was accepting my request really something that would make a person that happy?

"...Kin-chan-sama...Let this day forever be celebrated as a national holiday. It's a holiday, a holiday."

What, what the hell? It feels almost like a host of angels are surrounding her, blowing their trumpets in celebration.

Don't tell me she actually summoned something? You sure can't take mikos lightly, I guess.

I rubbed my eyes and double-checked that it had just been my imagination before beginning my explanation.

"So anyway, recently my continued wellbeing has been threatened by Kaname...GIV. Even though she pretends to be a docile, obedient child at school, but the second the two of us are alone, it becomes obvious her mind turns a little, you know. I mean, just from the way she calls herself my little sister you can tell how far gone she is."

"Holiday～"

"Did you hear a word of what I just said?"

You know, I've been feeling like Shirayuki's eyes are kinda unfocused here.

She reminds me of a cat that's just been run through the shower, just frozen in complete shock.

"Hey, listen up."

"Whee!"

"Counting by age, you'd be Kaname's older sister. In that girl's mind, she's my younger sister. That is to say, please don't fight, alright?"

"It's~a~holiday! I've gained another younger sister!"

"One more thing. It seems to Kaname, as long as they're family, living together is ok. I want to make use of that point, and have you join my family. Please always stay by my side- Uh, hello? Shirayuki?"

She...she fainted! While still holding on to her flowers, and even while still standing, she fainted!

What's more, the expression on her face makes it seem like she's died and gone to Heaven!

With a bodyguard like this, will I really be alright? We haven't even started, and I'm already feeling a little less safe.

Well, it's not like I had anyone else to rely on in the first place. Just this once, I'm in your care, Shirayuki.

Carrying her on my back, I'd made my way back to the bus stop before Shirayuki came to. She then proceeded to make the strangest comment, "You know, Kin-chan, I'm 100% OK with it, but from the viewpoint of the law..."

I yelled back, "Stop worrying about that!" and forcibly pulled her along.

Slightly worried about her lifeless state, I saw her off at the bus stop before making my way to Ambulance. I returned home after they finished tending to my knee, making it home at about 7 PM.

As I rode the elevator, I thumbed off the safety on my Beretta, reloaded to capacity, as well as sharpened the edge on my butterfly knife.

To a third party, I probably looked like I was about to enter a war-torn battlefield. I was really just heading home.

"...I'm back."

I opened the door, and stepped inside.

Though the living room light was lit, I saw no sign of Kaname.

Where did she run off to this time? Right as I had that thought, I heard sounds from the direction of the kitchen.

Making my way down the hallway, I noticed something fishy. The wooden floor was littered with drops of water.

What's going on here?

Confused, I made my way into the kitchen-

Only to crash into Kaname.

"...!"

"..."

Popsicle in mouth, Kaname appeared thoroughly astounded.

She was dressed in striped underwear...

...but only on her bottom half.

From the looks of things, she'd just finished a bath, and after drying her hair, had wandered over to the fridge to grab a popsicle. Geez,

even if this is your house, isn't this still a bit unrestrained?

The worst part was, I'd chosen this exact moment to come home.

"...I'm...I'm sorry!"

When you think about it, this was really the fault of the person who'd so carelessly wandered out in her underwear, but that didn't stop me from stammering out an apology.

Though thankfully the ends of the towel wrapped around her neck hung down, miraculously hiding her breasts from view-

But still...the subtle curves of her immature chest...were seen by me...

As I reflexively dropped my gaze, what filled my view instead were her panties. What the hell kind of underwear is this? It doesn't cover anything! I mean, I know that girls' bodies are smaller, but still, this is too much! Don't tell me this is the rumored T-back that Riko had previously mentioned.

-thump!

Deep within me, that familiar feeling of blood flowing began.

Hey! *Hey!*

Listen here, inner me! How dare you choose a moment like this to pull this kind of stunt!?

What happened to all the trust I placed in you back when I was facing down Kaname?

This is bull; she's just a junior student, and my self-proclaimed little sister to boot! The hell do you think you're doing, reacting to her-

Even though I've never thought of her as such, but...on the off chance she *is* my sister-

And I fall into Hysteria because of her-

This would be the greatest failing of my entire life!

Last month, Riko told me I was becoming less and less like a human. Now I was about to make that come true, in a completely different way! I was falling down the path of a beast, no less.

-Hehe.

Having lost my mind to panic, Kaname's laugh startled me.

"...It doesn't matter how much you think about it, Onii-chan. What the brain and the body want are two different things."

Naked from top to bottom, Kaname advanced towards me, one step at a time.

Madly scrambling, *crawling* to my bedroom for dear life, I frantically yanked out one of my shirts.

"Hur-, hurry up and cover yourself up! Maybe you think it's okay because you consider us siblings, but still, as a girl, you're too unguarded!"

Trying with all my might to avoid the slightest glance of her body, I waved my shirt in her direction-

-Which she grabbed.

~rustle~ ~rustle~

I guess she put it on?

"..."

I cautiously turned my head.

(...!)

I...

Had made a terrible mistake. Crap.

Kaname stood there, wearing my shirt, her thin, thin underwear

covering her bottom half.

...For some reason, that only made her all the more seductive.

THE HELL IS THIS!? How on earth is it that putting on more clothes made things more provocative than wearing just about nothing at all!?

Kaname drew one step closer.

"Don't worry about it so much, Onii-chan. Or rather, there's no need to think about anything at all."

As if to box me in, she stood with her back to the door, and gradually advanced.

I finally realized one very important fact: This...was the bedroom.

Even though the closet had drawn me here, finding myself trapped in this location, I only had myself to blame.

At last, Kaname-

Barely clothed, leaned into my chest.

Keep, keep a grip, Kinji...!

This is quite possibly the greatest trial of my endurance in my entire life.

If I can't hold on, the two of us might pass the point of no return!

"Isis and Osiris were brother and sister. So were Izanagi and Izanami. In Sweden, marriage law only forbids those marriages where blood relations exist on both sides of the family. In other words, as long as only one parent is shared, then brothers and sisters can marry."

"-What the hell are you saying!?"

"You're restraining yourself, aren't you, Onii-chan? I understand - that feeling in the pit of your stomach, the blood, beginning to

flow...That's why, as I said, the possibility is certainly there."

Kaname gazed at me with those beautiful eyes-

"I'm begging you, Onii-chan- Hold me tight..."

She stared straight into my soul, and pleaded with me.

What, what're the two of us *doing*?

If this was a normal household, then our parents, discovering their children engaged in some shady activities would punish us with a stiff warning...but in *this* house, it was just the two of us. There was no one to stop us.

No, wait, that's not right.

Wasn't it for this exact reason that I'd picked myself up a bodyguard just earlier?

"-Kaname! Starting from today, I have another half-sister coming to live with us."

"-eh? That's-"

"The reason you're staying here is because you're family, right? That's why, if there's another family member, you have no choice but to accept it. The rules that you made yourself, you must abide by!"

Having worked myself up, I spoke in a flurry. The problem was, would she believe it?

Even though I was anxious as could be within, Kaname didn't laugh.

Far from it; she seems to have taken my words at face value.

Contemplating my words-

She slowly nodded her head.

"-Then let's speed things up a bit. There's no time like the present."

"Er, huh?"

Right as my words left my mouth-

Kaname grabbed my sleeve and pulled me in the direction of the closet.

In order to stop her, I shifted my center of gravity, and struggled to the side-

Employing what appeared to be judo, Kaname caught hold of my tie and jacket, and pulled me once more in her direction. Dragging me with her own body, she deliberately fell back onto the bed.

"...!"

Kaname lay on the bed-

With me, pressing down on her.

That technique just now was way too showy.

"..."

The way things look, it's almost like I pushed Kaname down.

Kaname lay on her back, eyes gazing at me.

It's here. The moment has finally arrived.

"Onii-chan, before things go too far, there's something I want to tell you. Afterwards, you have to forget it, and never speak a word of it ever again. What I'm about to say...comes from the bottom of my heart, but is also against our rules."

Her eyes took on a serious expression I had never seen before.

"Wh, what is it?"

"You know, I...never really cared about combat. All of this...was for the sake of this moment. As long as I could live to experience this, then it's enough. That's because Onii-chan, you're my first love...and also my last."

Kaname's sea blue eyes fluttered...

As if about to sink into the deepest, darkest depths of the sea, she stood on the shore, and bared her heart to me.

"Kaname..."

You...

Why are your eyes so filled with sorrow?

For what purpose is it-

For what possible reason could the young, adorable you-

Shed tears like this? All while putting up a strong, smiling front?

"Onii-chan."

As Kaname's slender arm encircled me-

-I finally understood.

Having gradually switched into Hysteria Mode, I finally understood what it was with Kaname.

Kaname, she...will inevitably...

"Onii...chan..."

Kaname softly closed her eyes.

As if resolving herself to cross some line deep within her, she took a deep breath.

"I...won't let Onii-chan turn back. I, already cannot turn back. Just this once is enough, please treat me as a woman...!"

She forced those resolve-filled eyes open once more.

At that moment, before my eyes, I saw her cast off her child self.

Kaname...seems to have resolved herself. It seems at this moment,

she is no longer an artificially enhanced warrior, no longer my younger sister, but just a girl with an iron resolve. Discarding all thought, and crossing the boundaries of the relationship we'd had until now...

In order for us to understand one another, she implored of me.

And I-

Finally comprehending what I had been musing over, I spoke as if to accept her.

"...You seem nervous."

Relying on the half of me which was now in the grip of Hysteria Mode, I murmured to her.

"Of course. But don't mind me, Onii-chan. Hold me."

"If that's how it is, then just relax. If you're this stiff, then there's nothing we can do, right?"

Supporting myself with one elbow on the bed, I pressed in close to Kaname, and gently caressed her cheek and hair with my other arm.

Remembering that Kaname had mentioned she was fond of my looks, I supported her head with my hands, allowing her to look directly at me.

"Aaah..."

Kaname, seemingly having misunderstood my actions as finally agreeing to her demands, let out a voice both joyous and demure.

"Aah, Onii-chan...Onii-chan is looking at only me. And I am only looking at Onii-chan."

Kaname's slim arm wrapped around my back.

Her deep blue eyes were moved to tears.

"Wha, what is this...? This feeling...! From within my heart, my

core, my center...From deep within, something's happening. I'm scared...I'm scared, Onii-chan."

At last, it's begun. For the first time since her birth, Kaname's experiencing Hysteria Mode.

From this intimate distance, I watched Kaname's body, trembling without ceasing, and reflected on what was about to occur.

Kaname had always sought after, and dreamed about, using me to enter Hysteria Mode.

That dream...was about to be realized.

Unfortunately...it might not be what she was expecting.

If my guess is correct, the second Kaname's dream comes to fruition-

She will know despair.

So much so that afterwards, she will likely wish to disappear from the face of this Earth.

If that truly happens to be the case, then the various weapons in this room are a danger...though admittedly, this thinking might be a tad overprotective.

Thinking thusly, I reached my hand to my Beretta.

As part of the same motion-

My finger gently drew a line from Kaname's shoulder down her slender curves to her lower back.

It seems she misunderstood what I was doing, because she closed her eyes, and revealed an expression of mixed excitement and unease.

My finger drew ever so slowly down,

Until it neared her hips.

"-Ah!"

Her moist eyes, half-closed, snapped open in surprise.

Followed by which,

"...!"

Pulling back her arm which had been wrapped around me, she placed it against my chest.

It's as I thought.

Placing her arm against my chest...

She pushed, as if to reject me.

"No...no...no~"

"..."

Testing my theory, I leaned in even further.

"No...! -Brothers and sisters, this kind of thing...no!"

...~*drip*~...~*drip*~...

Kaname spoke as if to contradict everything she'd said until now-

While making the most lovable, most adorable expression yet, eyes overflowing with tears.

Her previously formidable strength was all but gone as she tried to push me away.

She was fighting back with all the strength of a cute little animal, and it seemed the slightest effort was all it would take to subdue her. Her knees, near my legs, trembled, inspiring pity, as she tried to lock her legs.

She's...scared.

This is no act. There's no way an act could reach such a degree.

She's...changed.

(As expected...)

As I lifted myself up, Kaname turned completely red, wiping her tears from her eyes with her hands...

As she continued to sob.

Her trembling, her fear - her every action evoked a primal male instinct to conquer, an extraordinary feeling of absolute loveliness.

The current Kaname was utterly incomparable to the her up until now. She exuded a charm that would drive men mad.

If it was any other man before her, I imagine his mind would be all but lost to thoughts of her.

However...

"...Put on your clothes, Kaname."

I sat up and tidied up my clothes.

For the time being, I'm not going to worry about whether or not she's my sister-

But there's one thing I've come to realize.

And it's due to that realization that I haven't raised a hand against her.

Kaname's current condition is that of Hysteria Mode-

-the female version.

If take my own experiences with Hysteria Mode as analogous, then it all makes sense.

Even though saying this myself is pretty humiliating, but when I enter Hysteria Mode, I become "irresistible" to women in every way. Whether it be my protectiveness or the way I speak, my every action tugs at their heartstrings.

Using this as a metaphor, the female Hysteria Mode enacts exactly the opposite change in body and mind. One will become such that men cannot help but want to protect you, and in this way, ensnare their hearts and minds.

...For example, the current Kaname.

(It's likely that that's not all there is to it either.)

Kaname, still trembling, sat up and looked at me with tear-filled eyes.

Looking at her, I inferred the existence of another change that had come upon her.

The male Hysteria Mode grants unparalleled strength. The central nervous system is primed for operation, and holding nothing back, one's full potential is unleashed. But this is all for the purpose of protecting women.

Looking at Kaname, however, it seems that the female version has the reverse effect.

It's a change which instead incites a feeling in men that they must do whatever it takes to protect her.

Hysteria Mode: men fight, and women are protected, with the result being that the enemy is taken down and the women escape unscathed.

From the evolutionary viewpoint of multiplying and protecting offspring, such a scheme only makes sense.

I stood up, and exited the bedroom. In my heart, I murmured-

-Kaname.

The way things look, it seems you've failed.

It doesn't look like a male-female HSS pair produces two superhumans...just one.

The so-called "Arcanum Duo" you described to me earlier seems to be purely hypothetical.

Given how hard it is for Kaname to trigger my Hysteria Mode, it seems only logical when it ends sooner than normal.

As for Kaname, she doesn't seem willing to leave the room, as I can still hear her sobs from within.

"..."

Slightly worried, I glanced toward the bedroom, peeking through a crack in the doorway.

Leaving the door purposely ajar like that is just too sly. Not only does it give off the impression that it'd be a minor thing to enter, but any time you'd pass by, you'd be struck by the desire to look in.

Through the slit in the doorway, I could faintly see Kaname huddled on the bed, her knees clutched to her chest, as she silently cried.

This scene was again one that left you feeling unable to leave her alone.

I didn't think it likely that this was intentional on Kaname's part, but rather that Hysteria Mode was drawing out her full feminine potential.

(Forcibly drawing someone in...before suddenly becoming weak and

delicate at the critical juncture...)

It's not like I had room to talk, but...female Hysteria Mode sure played dirty.

If it was someone unfamiliar with the nature of Hysteria Mode, they'd likely find themselves unavoidably feeling pity for her, and thus enter the room. After entering and seeking to comfort her, without noticing, things would probably pass the point of no return.

Normal Kaname, violent Kaname, and now Hysteria Mode Kaname.

Almost like two, no, three separate personalities.

Although this feeling was slightly different from the empathy of a fellow sufferer...

As one who also bore the curse that was Hysteria Mode, I could well understand how distraught she must be.

It wasn't until later that night, around 9 PM or so, that Kaname finally left the room.

She had changed into the uniform I'd left for her by the door. She didn't speak a word.

It looked as if the realization of the true nature of her Hysteria Mode had sunk in, and her lifeless eyes appeared devoid of spirit.

It seemed that her Hysteria Mode had since ended.

Perhaps the female Hysteria Mode lasts a lot longer than the male one?

Or maybe it's simply that it's harder to distinguish when its effects have faded.

"...You hungry?"

At my attempt to make conversation-

She slowly nodded her head, the look of utter dismay never leaving her face, her eyes never meeting mine.

"Go ahead and eat. Although, saying that is kinda weird, since you made the curry after all."

Speaking to her as gently as possible, I went back into the kitchen.

I filled a plate with the reheated curry, and the two of us walked back to the dinner table...

And ate in complete silence.

Kaname's thoughts still seemed to be in disarray. I'd probably best let her think things through for a bit. When all is said and done, this wasn't exactly the kind of situation that called for chatter, and I had no plans on reminding her of the futility of what had just happened.

Nonetheless, at this point in time, it was vital that I not leave her alone.

At the very least, when it came to the little things in life that she so looked forward to, such as eating together like this...it was the least I could do to keep her company.

I'll wait for her to speak when she's ready.

(...)

This feeling reminded me of when I was young. I'd get into a heated argument with my schoolmates over some tiny thing or another, which would break out into a fight. Later, on the way home, I'd fall into a disheartened silence like she's going through right now.

At those times, Nii-san would do what I'm doing right now.

Never staring, he'd just eat along with me silently, never prying for details. He'd simply allow me to act as we did everyday.

This simple act...filled my heart with peace.

It let me know that I still had family, I still had a place to call home.

In that home, I had a brother who would lovingly forgive everything.

Recalling those memories was enough to move me to tears, such was the strength of that feeling of comfort.

As I sat there, accompanying Kaname, who continued to eat her curry in silence-

I remembered-

That time I spent with Nii-san...it was curry too.

Epilogue - Go for the Next!! Impromptu Sisters -Belt Link-

The following morning, I woke up early after being disturbed by the flickering sunlight shining through the window.

Rubbing my eyes, I put on my shirt and pants before making my way into the living room.

The sight of Kaname on the balcony, dressed in her uniform, greeted my eyes.

Several gulls had gathered around her, though not because she was feeding them. Rather, she was frolicking with them cheerfully.

A blue sky and a blue ocean. White clouds and white birds.

And...a beautiful young girl with a blossoming smile, radiant under the morning light.

...What a picturesque scene. She almost seemed to sparkle vividly, and I found myself enchanted by the sight.

"Morning, Kaname."

As I walked out onto the balcony-

Kaname softly spoke to the gulls, about to take flight at my disturbance,

"It's alright. There's nothing to be afraid of here."

As if they understood her words, the gulls changed their minds and continued to prowl the balcony.

"...You can talk to birds?"

"Nope. It's just a feeling."

With the sound of crashing waves coming from behind her, Kaname turned to me with a bitter smile on her face. It looks like she's calmed down.

Just like that, the two of us were bathed in the light of the morning sun.

"I'd thought...that Onii-chan didn't really know how to say no to anyone. I never would have guessed you were such a strong-willed person."

"...What's that?"

"To be honest, I don't have any memories of yesterday starting from when things started to get heated. However, I've checked myself, and it seems you didn't do a thing to me."

She forgot what happened yesterday?

"-After I entered Hysteria Mode, it was almost as if my brain switched over to another personality entirely. Although the effects appear to differ from person to person, but for me, the switch was pretty absolute."

Her explanation reminded me of Nii-san.

Once Nii-san enters Hysteria Mode, he truly becomes Kana, both body and soul. Once in that state, even if I were to call him "Nii-san", he wouldn't know I was addressing him.

It seems Kaname's Hysteria Mode carries similar side-effects.

That said, once he reverted back to his normal state, he retained all memories of his time as Kana. Subsequently, any time I brought up something related to Kana, he'd turn completely red before proceeding to give me a beating.

Kaname's case, however, seems to be even more inconvenient, as even now her memories of that time remain indistinct.

"...Onii-chan, forgive me."

Kaname's face filled with shame as she looked out at the ocean. Her blue eyes seemed lifeless and broken, as if she'd given up on everything.

"You probably think I'm gross, right? Someone like me just appearing out of nowhere, and saying over and over that I like you."

-Her beautiful face broke out in a twisted smile, bitter with self-loathing.

"Yesterday, as I experienced HSS for the first time in my life, though it lasted some few tens of minutes, years of thoughts seemed to run through my mind. As I pondered these things, I came to a realization. I...was never needed by Onii-chan."

"Kaname..."

"I...well, I had not the slightest understanding of how love truly worked. That's why I foolishly believed that if I just got rid of all the other girls, that if I had you all to myself...then you'd love me. I'd thought that as long as I could enter Hysteria Mode at will, as long as I could fulfill the duty GIII appointed to me, then I'd never have to see Los Alamos again. I was that desperate."

-Los Alamos-

That's the place Watson had mentioned previously...

The research institute where GIII and GIV - Kaname - had been born and grown up in.

"The 'Los Alamos Elite Plan'...do you know of it, Onii-chan?"

"A little. I've looked a little into your past, after all. Its goal is to use science to create gifted individuals, right? If I remember correctly, they were called something like 'man-made geniuses'."

"That's just the name they used for appearance's sake. The real goal of Los Alamos was to create human weapons, the latest form of ultimate weapons."

"...Ultimate weapons...?"

"Humans with superhuman fighting abilities, each one capable of fighting a large force singlehandedly. The idea was to create a vast number of these individuals, and loose them on enemy countries to repeatedly and endlessly wreak havoc, assassinate VIPs, and thus bring about the destruction of those nations. This is the truth behind the so-called 'man-made geniuses': they are living weapons in all but name."

Destroy...countries...? America, have you gone mad?

I know you love war, but this is too much.

From Watson's description, were that GIII, who earned an R-rank designation, to take things seriously, it'd be enough to destroy a small country.

But a hundred of him? A thousand? Perhaps even a large country would fall to ruin before them.

That seems to be America's new form of suicidal terrorist tactics.

"The politics of nuclear disarmament and a reduction in defense spending have resulted in America seeking new angles in weapons research. The resulting research diverged into 92 different schemes, of which the Los Alamos Elite Plan is but one among many."

Kaname lightly swung her foot in the air, before continuing.

"I am the fourth of the G series, a line of genetically modified individuals in accordance with that plan, naught but a weapon, a product. From the very first moment I can remember, I already held a knife in my hands. The training we underwent made the war you see in movies seem but a passing amusement, but for me, such things were simply a part of daily life. Things that were deemed inhumane to perform on 'humans' were carried out time and again on we 'things'. Day in, and day out."

I thought back to the words Kaname had spoken back in the Logi parking structure,

"*This kind of attack is something I've already experienced hundreds of times before during training.*"

"It's from that kind of place...that you escaped?"

"It was III who offered me freedom, along with others like us. All of those who escaped had been labeled as defective products, either to be 'discarded' elsewhere or brought back for 'repair'."

Discarded...repaired...

At these words which weren't normally used in the context of describing people, I furrowed my brow.

"With III at our head, we struggled desperately and prevailed. Because I was still growing, I couldn't do a thing to help. Nevertheless, because I carried within me the potential that HSS bears, the potential to become a warrior of standing, III did not abandon me."

"HSS...Hysteria Mode..."

"I've long dreamed of learning how to unlock the potential hidden with my HSS genes, of showing their worth. If I can't do that, then as far as III is concerned, I *have* no worth. Those without value are not allowed to continue under his protection. Such is his way."

"..."

"I already know far too much concerning III. If he finds out I, too, am a worthless existence...then it won't be long before he comes to claim my life. And I...won't try to stop him. There's no way I'd oppose someone so much stronger than me, it'd be simply irrational."

"That GIII, back in the Shinagawa Geofront, did he not declare himself a Butei? What's more, he's said he will not kill."

At my words, Kaname laughed lightly.

"-You don't understand; I'm not a person. Anyway, even if he doesn't kill me...if he abandons me, then there's nothing I can do to escape from those who America will send. At long last, I'll be sent back to the institute to be 'repaired'...This, I always feared...And yet..."

Once more, Kaname showed forth a twisted smile.

"And yet, in the end, I never became strong. You saw it clearly yesterday, didn't you, Onii-chan? My HSS is the kind that turns you weak...From the standpoint of one whose sole purpose behind creation was the notion that HSS would make me strong, I'm a complete and utter failure. With nothing left to 'fix', that leaves only 'discarding', right?"

"Discarding...you mentioned that word earlier, don't tell me...?"

"-It means I'll be killed. If they feel money's a concern, it'll probably be poison gas or something similar."

"Hey, hey..."

"Don't look like that. This is fate."

As I watched Kaname, who stood before me, gaze out across the ocean as she simultaneously ridiculed herself while forcing a smile-

-I...

Felt a deep-seated fury flare up within the depths of my heart.

Though I felt that her situation was indeed pitiful, nevertheless, my feelings of rage far outweighed any feelings of sympathy.

Tsuzuri-sensei of Masters had previously commented that my personality was such that I tried to maintain my distance from others. That's why I normally wasn't the kind of person to get angry on behalf of others.

And yet...as I looked at Kaname, I couldn't help but have my emotions be stirred up.

Because...when I look at her, all I see is myself-

Forced into battle, time and again, and all because of this thrice-cursed "Hysteria Mode" ability.

"Kaname."

Hearing the deep emotion in my voice as I called out to her, she spun around.

"Before...when I gave you a name, were you not so happy that you broke into tears? Was that not because you did not believe yourself to be some sort of human weapon?"

"That...was because I wanted to believe it, wanted to dream that sweet dream. But reality isn't so forgiving. I was born in a research institute, and so it is my fate to be a tool of the military..."

"Where you were born is meaningless! There's no way in hell something as *stupid* as that determines a person's destiny!"

Right now, I am decidedly not under the influence of Hysteria Mode, and so I find myself unable to speak to girls in that gentle, considerate tone.

Nonetheless, I think that...

...right now, this is what's needed.

I'm going to bare my thoughts, and give it to her straight.

"What we mean by 'person'...is someone who, by their own strength, with their own hands, scraps that bullshit we call fate! From what you've just said - whether it be the stuff about that research institute or helping III - aren't *you* the one throwing your life in the hands of others!? Look at you! You're, um...beautiful, smart, athletic! Someone like you has no need for someone like GIII to save you, you can save yourself!"

"I can't do it by myself. Someone like me with neither nationality nor even human rights needs to be protected by someone. And if I want someone to help to me, then I need to be of value to them. The only one who's ever recognized my worth is III. Even though even that turned out to be a lie..."

"-You've got it all backwards!"

As I scolded Kaname, my voice took on a tone increasingly like my brother's, when he'd reprimand me.

"Backwards...?"

"If you want others to acknowledge, you first have to acknowledge yourself! That's the first thing about being a person! Anyway, you're wrong about one thing...*I* acknowledge you. Did I not just praise you? Did I not just say you were smart and your athleticism's a sight to see? I wasn't just saying it; I really meant it, from the bottom of my heart."

At my screaming, Kaname's round eyes grew larger.

"-I think you also know, but I had a kouhai check up on you. Although, to be honest, I already knew - you're an amazing person. You're not just openly welcomed by the first years, you know what the second years call us? 'Brilliant sister, moronic brother'."

Having carelessly spoken something I'd rather have had remained hidden, I gave a small cough before continuing.

"...Although of course it's nice to have someone to rely on, don't think for a second you can't go on without it. That's what we call becoming 'dependent'. It doesn't matter who, everyone has things they have to overcome on their own, and for you, this is it."

As I spoke, the feeling she gave off, of someone I couldn't leave alone, reminded me of Reki.

I don't think it's even something she's doing intentionally...but, without a doubt, including those she's mimicked before - Aria, Shirayuki, and Riko, now her repertoire even includes Reki's distinctive traits. Just how many of my weak spots does this girl need to hit before she's satisfied?

"I think what Onii-chan's said is right...but still-"

Kaname seemed to nod slightly before lowering her head, mumbling quietly, as her body trembled lightly.

Her fragile appearance was reminiscent of an orphan with nowhere to turn, and no one to turn to.

As if worrying, the seagulls all turned to watch her.

"...I don't get it. If I leave III, then where am I supposed to go...? Why was I born? Just who...am I...?"

Covering her face in those snow white hands...

She began to softly weep.

This was finally an action appropriate for her age, befitting a junior high school girl.

Seriously...

This girl just loved to cry.

No, actually I should be the one in the wrong here, as the one who made her cry. Since I was speaking to a girl younger than me, perhaps I shouldn't have spoken quite so harshly? Man, I'm just not any good when it comes to talking to women.

...Thinking quietly to myself, and scratching my head in embarrassment...

I saw Kaname's eyes, peeking through the cracks in her fingers, slowly turn to me.

"..."

Through this small action, her thoughts were conveyed to me, and I more or less understood what it was she wanted to say.

Sigh...there's no two ways about this.

I had, after all, made her cry on more than one occasion already.

Maybe this would serve as my atonement. An apology was a small enough thing for me to do, and moreover, the right thing to do.

"Until you find your answer, just stay by my side."

Even though I felt like I was a bit of a victim of circumstance here-

But, the fact of the matter was, I had no defense against a girl's tears. That time with Aria stood as a perfect example.

These few days, I'd learned the lesson anew from my time with Kaname. When it comes to women, I have three weaknesses: tears, fragrance, and...and, er, what was it? Oh, right, thighs. I'd better watch out for them in the future.

As I was lost in thought-

"Onii-chan...Onii-chan...!"

Kaname suddenly grabbed me in a hug.

Even though the position we now found overselves in was exactly like the one in the locker room previously...things couldn't be more different. *She* couldn't be more different.

She'd become, in truth, a pure, innocent, and fragile maiden.

Her virtuous innocence, having come at a time when my mind was fraught with impure thoughts, filled me with shame, and my cheeks flushed in embarrassment.

"The circumstances behind your Hysteria Mode will die with me. To be honest, even the existence of my own Hysteria Mode I've long kept hidden from everyone. That's why, this will be our little secret, okay?"

"Our little secret..."

Kaname gleefully repeated my words, nodding her head with an "Nn, nn", while never lifting her head, buried in my chest, so much as an inch.

She certainly seems to enjoy clinging to me like this...

As I lightly patted her on the back to help her calm down, she wept tears of joy-

"...Onii-chan...is really such a kind person. Onii-chan, and only Onii-chan, will never reject me. I, I..."

Her heart touched, Kaname raised her head to look at me, and seeing my cheeks red...

Her cheeks reddened as well.

...Uh oh.

It seems like that strange switch of hers has just been flipped on...

"-Onii-chan."

"Hmm? Why don't you let go of me? Let's head back in and eat breakfast, alright?"

"I know...my feelings are one-sided. But, I beg you, let me just say this once more, do this once more."

There it is. Kaname-sama's prided conversational skill.

Anytime she says "just this once", a red flag is waved in my mind.

Although I haven't the slightest clue what it is she wants to say, or do, but still, I'd better end this conversation as soon as possible.

Just as I was about to cut her off by saying "Well, then let's hurry and-", she instead interrupted me, saying,

"-I honestly, sincerely love you, Onii-chan."

After she spoke, she tilted her head slightly, and-

Just like Aria, stretched forward, and with a speed surpassing Aria's-

Kissed me on the lips.

"...!"

Given the present atmosphere, the last thing I wanted to do was push her away, so I waited a few seconds before-

We parted lips. I quickly covered my mouth as if to say, "okay, that's it."

Seeing my reaction, Kaname laughed lightly, and said, "Onii-chan, you're so red! So cute!"

As if no longer able to stand the sight of this flirtatious couple, one after another, the gulls took wing into the morning sky.

Their flapping wings sounded an applause. Their snow-white feathers danced in the air.

(Oh...that's right. This time also...)

I realized that this time as well, Hysteria Mode had failed to show itself.

Even though it wasn't the case that I *couldn't* do so because of her...

But still, it wasn't an easy thing. Harder than for anyone else, anyway. Even for a girl as cute as she was.

It looked to be the same for Kaname. It seems things need to reach a certain degree before anything happens.

Just what is the root of this phenomenon?

As I sunk deep into my thoughts, pondering this mystery-

My train of thought was cut short by a loud burst of metallic sound, almost like the coiling of a gigantic spring.

"Iiiiiiiiiiiiiiiit wasn't just once, but twiiiiiiiiiice!"

-Uooooooooooooooh-!

A fierce sound, like the bellowing of a crazed bull pierced through the air like a siren.

A mysterious wind blew towards the balcony from inside.

"...!"

I, I forgot...!

Although I was the one who'd called her over, but because of the stuff with Kaname, I'd completely forgotten-

Forgotten that Kaname aside, there was still another, yet one more

who would break out into a murderous rage at the drop of a hat!

Almost like a robot whose rusting joints hadn't been oiled in ages, I slowly turned my head around. Sure enough...

"...Shira-, Shirayuki!"

Shirayuki, wearing a terrifying expression not unlike that of a fierce Nio statue[21], stood in the living room.

It, it was a person wholly unlike the Shirayuki I'd called to Odaiba. Needless to say, it was Kuroyuki who'd appeared.

As if the menacing, dark aura pouring out from her weren't threatening enough...

Far more threatening was watching Shirayuki, dressed in her school uniform, easily wielding her M60 machine gun with a single hand, and taking aim at both Kaname and I.

"To go so far as to do it with Kin-chan-sama *twice*! That's more than me! How envious!"

Sprouting from the side of her M60's belt feed near her back, was a glittering bandolier of 7.62mm NATO rounds arrayed in a metallic, split-link belt, unwinding like a scroll.

In an effort to avoid jamming, the ribbon-like bandolier was laid out horizontally across her other arm, flowed over to her feet, where it lay coiled in several loops, continued past her white socks...and into her skirt.

Just...just how many bul-, no, hundreds of bullets is that!?

(-!)

At that moment-

From by my side-

A second dark and murderous aura began to flow forth.

"...Hey, Two-Face."

Still clinging to me, Kaname stared daggers at Shirayuki.

"Are you trying to steal Onii-chan from me?"

This, this one's changed too!

This is that horrifying, knife-wielding Kaname!

From among the three personalities she has, her channel's been flipped to number two- the most formidable Kaname-san.

"-That's what I want to say! Even if you are my younger sister, once you violate family rules, then it's time for punishment! Punishment, punishment, I say!"

That notwithstanding, even in this crazy circumstances, Shirayuki still seems to have remained every bit the Butei.

From what she just said, it seems she's carrying out my request, and is fully engaged in her role as my "other sister".

"Stop interrupting me and Onii-chan! It's time for you to go, Onee-chan!"

As if to stand guard over me, Kaname jumped in front of me, her bangs swaying.

Suddenly catching sight of a rather odd shadow, I turned my head-

And saw an X-shaped strip of cloth, floating in the air. Its blade-like edges capable of serving as a bulletproof shield, it hovered dangerously in the air behind us.

My house always seems to erupt in war.

Shirayuki and Kaname, these temporary sisters, glared at one another with outrage evident in their expressions.

"Onee-chan, you've already lost to me once already. Don't tell me you think you can win? That's just too irrational."

"Kaname, you still have much to learn. You should check the concentration of Riri particles at least once a night."

"What can I say? At night, Onii-chan-sama doesn't give me an~y time to rest~"

Kaname revealed an impish grin as she mimicked Shirayuki's double honorific style.

"What did you say!? D....D....D-...!"

The barrel of her M60 trembled as Shirayuki, shrieking enigmatically-

Appeared to have something awaken deep within her, as her eyes opened wide with a seemingly audible *snap!*. Holy crap, that's scary.

Her cherry red lips were held open, mouth agape and twitching...Ugh, I should have known better than to read her lips. Shirayuki-san was continuously mouthing "I'll. Kill. You.", although in her extreme rage, no sounds left her mouth.

"Kaname! In this world, there are things that siblings can do, and things they can never do! What are you, some kind of animal!?"

And waving around a machine gun like a madman in someone else's

house is a thing you "can do", Shirayuki!?

"A...a duel! As long as it's a duel, even accidental deaths are okay! What matters here is, in order to ensure the stability of the Tohyama house, and to afterwards guarantee the peace of our everyday lives, this duel is unavoidable!"

Bandolier in hand, Shirayuki's mouth seemed almost to spit fire as she screamed.

"Ka, kakakaka, KANAME! I CHALLENGE YOU TO A DUEL! As Kin-chan-sama's fiancée, I challenge you to a duel!"

Huh...?

(Fi...fiancée?)

Uh...Shirayuki-san? I'm very grateful that you were willing to accept my request, and pretend to be a member of my family...

But uh...is it just me or has the SETTING COMPLETELY CHANGED!?

Go For The Next!

1. ↑ Red string of fate
2. ↑ Did that make not an ounce of sense to you? Good, me neither.
3. ↑ Kamome = seagull
4. ↑ I could have phrased this better, but since Kinji seems to be having a hard time understanding it himself, I intentionally made it more ambiguous. Riko uses "人間離れ人間". 人間 means human/humanity. 離 refers to separating from or leaving. The idea seems to be that Riko is saying that through his relationship with Kaname, he's abased himself to the point he ought no longer be counted as part of humanity.
5. ↑ Similarity
6. ↑ For those interested, the original was in katakana, and spelled out "ウラギリモノ" - traitor.

7. ↑ Office lady
8. ↑ According to Wikipedia, a company consists of anywhere from 80-250 soldiers, whereas a battalion can range from 300-1200.
9. ↑ GIII is CAPTAIN AMERICA. [TN: I know this isn't a real TN note, but I couldn't help myself.]
10. ↑ I probably don't need to explain this, but in case you didn't catch the subtext: They're engaged in role plays, etc. and so Kinji feels there's a sexual connotation to Watson's usage of the term "play".
11. ↑ It's written "L" on the letter she sent Kinji, so I left it as-is above. She uses "エル", i.e. L/Elle in katakana here, though, so I opted for the female name which was likely intended.
12. ↑ This isn't a terribly common English saying, though it does get used. See this for more detail. The original saying in Japanese/Chinese is one that seems common outside of English: if it happens twice, it'll surely happen thrice.
13. ↑ Sarashi
14. ↑ Meijin and Ryu-ou are the two most prestigious designations in professional shogi.
15. ↑ This is not a mistake. I know Watson is a girl, and thus this ought to be a "she". However, this is Kinji's portrayal of Shiranui's thought process, and Shiranui doesn't know she's a girl.
16. ↑ Some VN terms here. They're pretty self-explanatory, though, so I won't bother explaining. If you need to Google them, be careful :P
17. ↑ Haha. Now this is a difficult one. To understand this, a short description of how kanji/furigana are used in HnA is necessary. Kanji (characters) have specific meanings attached to them, but can be read in different ways. To resolve this, furigana (the tiny kana you see next to kanji) are used to show how it ought to be read. In HnA, the author will frequently introduce series-specific terminology by pairing kanji giving a literal description of the term with katakana showing its name. In this case, the katakana name part reads Arcanum Duo, whereas the kanji bear the description of siblings crossing extremes. What this means Kaname will explain in just a moment.
18. ↑ Probably obvious, but the term here is referring to romantic

love.

19. ↑ An intelligence interface system described in chapter 3.
20. ↑ Church bells ringing out after a wedding are a Western tradition, if you missed the reference.
21. ↑ Nio statue

Afterword

Thank you for the excellent ratings for the 'Hidan no Aria' anime! I am Akamatsu.

However, during scenes such as changing clothes, a luminous Unidentified Mysterious Animal (UMA) known as “Skyfish” flew just in front of the camera. This caused the good scenes to be blurred…

That’s regrettable!

Actually, the anime will have a Blu-ray version and a DVD version!

In these versions, those “Skyfish” have been driven away by the UMA hunting team of the SSR, making the pictures look very clear!

Please purchase these discs and watch those cute and handsome scenes and activate your Hysteria Mode. Then, you can recall those scenes! This is how you can become a true Aria fan!

And to those people who proclaim that they are already Aria fans,

Do you know about “AA”?

In fact, in the “Aria the Scarlet Ammo” series… lies another story that takes place in the same timeline as this current series. The story is called “Aria the Scarlet Ammo AA” (Young GANGAN has already launched two volumes).

AA is co-starred by four Butei from Butei High.

From its appearance, it looks like a clichéd work of mischievous girls…

But after all, the setting is set in Butei High. The contents do not just include fighting, melee or shooting, it also has scenes of girls possessing supernatural powers. It is a manga with basic Aria-type scenes.

The story is interrelated with the current light novels, so characters like Aria and Kinji will appear. You can also find character backgrounds that never made their way into the light novels.

In the production team, Kobuichi-sensei will be responsible for character design, Tachibana Shogako-sensei, who is awesome at fighting and beauty scenes, will take charge of the illustrations, while the plot will be written by me.

These works are currently being serialized in Young GANGAN, hence people who are waiting for new volumes of the light novels can read the manga in the meantime. Ah～ this makes me feel so happy!

Other than the light novels and the anime, there are still many other interesting works that are expanding the Aria universe.

Those readers who haven't gotten the AA experience, be sure to read it to explore the Aria universe…

At the same time, if you find that the tenth volume is not enough for you, please wait for the next volume!

Here, I shall give you a hint – something big is going to happen to Kinji!

July 2011 – Akamatsu Chuugaku

Illustrator's Note

Congratulations on the release of the tenth volume!

Aria has finally reached its tenth volume!

The girl on the cover page is Shirayuki.

This is my first time drawing her with a M60, it really took a lot of hard work.

If I can use my diligence to make it look very nice, that would be really good.

A new character has appeared in the series, people really can't take their eyes off her!

For the anime, it should stop airing by the time this volume gets published. It's very interesting to watch the characters in the action-packed anime.

Translator's Notes and References